A LONDON MOSAIC

W. L. GEORGE
AND
PHILIPPE FORBES-ROBERTSON

A LONDON MOSAIC

WRITINGS OF W. L. GEORGE

NOVELS

CALIBAN
BLIND ALLEY
THE STRANGERS' WEDDING
THE SECOND BLOOMING
A BED OF ROSES
THE CITY OF LIGHT
ISRAEL KALISCH
(*American Title:* UNTIL THE DAY BREAK)
THE MAKING OF AN ENGLISHMAN
(*American Title:* THE LITTLE BELOVED)
OLGA NAZIMOV (SHORT STORIES)

MISCELLANEOUS

WOMAN AND TO-MORROW
DRAMATIC ACTUALITIES
ANATOLE FRANCE
THE INTELLIGENCE OF WOMAN
A NOVELIST ON NOVELS
(*American Title:* LITERARY CHAPTERS)
EDDIES OF THE DAY

A LONDON MOSAIC

Text by

W. L. GEORGE

Pictures by

PHILIPPE FORBES-ROBERTSON

NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

Manufactured in Great Britain

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

I
PRELUDE

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE

THE first thing that impresses me as I begin this short book on London is the large number of subjects of which I will say nothing. There are many reasons for this. One is that a title such as *A London Mosaic* is as difficult to compose to as *Life* or *Love*. (Two novels are still on sale under these somewhat atlasian titles, but as an author does not wish to be unkind in the first paragraphs of a book, they need not be reviewed.) Another reason is that Mr E. V. Lucas, Mrs E. T. Cook, John o' London, Mr G. R. Sims, have compiled various volumes of passionate Baedeker, and I hesitate to set my feet in their mighty footprints. For so much of this London is unknown to me, and I have learnt little of her, indeed, learned little except to love her. Thus, in this book, you will find no lists of houses where famous people lived. This may seem strange, but it wakes in me no thrill to see a circular plate of debased wedgwood imposed by a maternal L.C.C. upon a wall of innocent stucco coated with eternal dirt. To read that William Hazlitt died here, or lived there, does not add much to the fact that William Hazlitt lived. It may be interesting to know that Hazlitt chose that sort of house, though it is likely that he did not choose it, but accepted it; a house does not define a man of worth, for men of worth are mostly poor, and their houses reflect them not. Many must have hated them. Yet, I happen to know Huxley's house in St John's Wood, and Carlyle's house in Chelsea (there is no getting over that one when friends arrive from America), but it is not exciting knowledge, and I incline to rejoice with Kingsley that it is not the house one lives in matters, but the house opposite. Unfortunately, the house opposite is generally just as bad: the only thing that reconciles one to one's house is that the people opposite see most of it.

I shall not tell you anything of 'quaint corners,' or 'picturesque bits.' I will not cut up and pickle London. Ever since the days of Dickens (or is it since those of Dr Syntax ?) people have ranged

our unfortunate town armed with a butterfly-net: swoop! caught Cloth Fair! Another swoop! Staple Inn lies in the butterfly-net. Quick, into the pickle-jar. Now for the cyanide. Here they are, London butterflies, ready for delineation by Mr Hugh Thompson. No, I will pickle you no living strips of London Town, and I promise that not once will I portray a humorous bus-conductor. One reason is that there are no humorous bus-conductors; there are only raucous brutes, working long hours, and maintained in a state of pessimism because these long hours separate them from the public-house. They do not, however, separate them enough.

There will be no East in the West, nor West in the East. There will be no list of statues, for nobody ever looks at statues. There is a statue of George Stephenson at Euston, and one of William Pitt in Hanover Square. That is very interesting, isn't it? It is a terrible commentary upon fame that when you erect a statue to a man he becomes invisible. You pass a statue every day, but you never look at it, you pass it. Nobody cares for statues, except the birds, who make them a venue for love and war. Christopher Wren did say that if you required a monument you should look about you; thus does the London population. Those who have noticed Mr Peabody, miraculously encased in a frock coat several sizes too small, Mr Huskisson stark naked, and one of the Georges on his little horse, trotting to nowhere in particular, as was the way of his dynasty, will agree that it is no wonder statues fail to arouse even merriment.

No, there are no statues in this book. There are no pictures either. I shall not tell you how to find the Madonna degli Ansidei in the National Gallery, nor direct you to the Flaxmans of University College. The catalogues can do that. That is, if you want to know, and are not one of the ordinary beings who use the museums to get out of the rain or for the innocent purposes of courtship. (I recommend the Geological; chilly, but leads to concentration). Sometimes, in remorseful mood, when the word 'ought,' which as a rule means little to me, suddenly assumes material shape to the extent of a faint mist, I tell myself that I am

very uneducated, and regrettably unrepentant, that I 'ought' to care that Swift lived in Bury Street and Sir Isaac Newton in Jermyn Street, and that I 'ought' to find desecration in the fact that where the dog Diamond barked, the plates of Jules's Balkan waiters clatter. And I go to Jules's to lunch and to meditate on gravitation. But Jules can cook, and while eating his meats you do not meditate; and he is so popular that as soon as you have finished those meats, you are driven out by the eyes of some young couple, beaming with love and appetite. Nor may you meditate opposite the houses of the great; it annoys the police. So, after this faint attempt, the slender 'ought' evaporates. Perhaps because of that I have not yet succeeded in visiting the Tower, the Roman Bath, the Foundling, the Soane Museum, the Mint, and many other places which doubtless would improve my mind.

I am not a student, but a lover of London; it amuses me much more to notice that one man shouts: 'Paw Maw! Exper! Paw Maw!' while another does it like this: 'Per Mer! Gateshpozervenment!' than to bask in the knowledge that Johnson lived in Gough Square. This arises, I suppose, from having taken London as I found her, and from not being a Londoner. The first twenty years of my life having been spent in another country, I did not treat London as a relation, but as some one whom I liked. Everything of her was interesting, and there is to-day no mews where I cannot hear the footsteps of her smutty nymphs. The entry into London is such a romantic march; I say march because it is worth doing on foot. But as I speak to Londoners, we had better do it by train, for they would grow tired of her. When Londoners say 'London,' they mean Piccadilly, Selfridges, Covent Garden, that sort of thing, and that is not London. London is Tottenham and Chiswick, the 'Paragon,' Mile End, Walker's Court and what it sells, and the black doss places under the railway arches. London is Houndsditch, where everybody looks bad, and Cornwall Gardens where everybody looks good. London is a congress-house of emotions.

When one looks at the map, particularly if it is on a large

scale, London looks like a splash, rather longer than it is broad, with railway lines radiating in all directions, rather like a spider's web, the centre being tenanted by whoever you like. And one thinks of Dick Whittington gaily treading in the spider's web. But, in fact, one does not come out of the everywhere into the here of London. One melts into London, and one hardly knows how one comes to abandon the rest of the world. There is a moment when the Essex or Kentish marsh ceases to lap so uniformly against Medway or Thames. One has a sense of population, of rather large houses set rather far apart, but not yet so far apart as in the counties; of grounds less richly endowed with the high walls crowned with broken glass which announce that respectable people live inside. One reads names on the platforms: 'Brentwood,' or 'Malling,' and there is a sprinkling of villas, with plenty of white paint and concrete, and red roofs and leaded panes. One glimpses cerise curtains, and one knows with painful accuracy where to look for the back of the swing mirror. Then, again, gaps, cows. It must have been a mistake, it is not London after all! But there come more platforms and more villas, then a row of shops, shops not branded with the names one would expect to find, such as 'Boots' or 'Home and Colonial,' but brisk, individual little shops belonging to Smith, and to Jones, yet strangely alike in build, furnished by the same shopfitter, just as the owners will be buried by the same undertaker. (He is quite ready, for he owns one of the shops.) That is individualism, which, like the camomile plant, is ever bruised and ever arises.

The train rumbles on, and the houses change. They are still detached, but less detached: they are separated by privet hedges over which a man can look, and so they have an air of fellowship. Suddenly, one enters a little colony of houses; one sees a postman on foot instead of on a bicycle, a horse omnibus and no carrier's cart; one sees a policeman too: the world is growing less respectable; it must be London after all. But again come gaps and cows, except that now the gaps are described as 'desirable freehold sites' with loudly advertised frontages. The earth is already torn up, and excavations are turning into roads; one observes a solitary

THE REGENT CANAL
AT MAIDA HILL

To face page 6

gas-lamp, and on a board the words ' Macedonia Avenue.' No avenue is built yet, but it is foredoomed to Macedonia.

All that is the overflow of London; it is the fugitive London which has no love or understanding of the town. The movement of a Londoner who rises in life seems to follow a definite curve; if he begins in Whitechapel the wheel of fortune may take him to Streatham; after a while he will dream of a place in the country and realise his dream perhaps at Purley Oaks; by the time his son has come back from Oxford, his wife will have been ambitious enough to remove him to South Kensington; thence, the last step, to God's quadrilateral between Oxford Street and Piccadilly, Regent Street, and Park Lane. After the bankruptcy the process is reversed. Outward, then inward, and outward again. It is like the tide.

But the train goes on, and unexpectedly, we find age after youth, Croydon, Sydenham, Edmonton, places where again the walls are high, the oaks thick, where are deep lawns, heavy stucco fronts, little crowded streets with spreading market places. We breathe the air of genteel sleep. Genteel, perhaps, but restless sleep, for these are old villages made into islands.

They seem vaguely annoyed among the trams; they blink at the sky-signs and the objurgations of Bovril. But it is too late; round each little group run fifty streets, each one comprising a hundred houses or so, all complete, with Nottingham lace curtain and Virginia creeper. The old house may call itself ' The Lodge,' but ' Chatsworth ' and ' Greville Towers ' are round the corner. Indeed, we forget them as we go on, for now, as the train roars over railway bridges, through cuttings, we look down on the endless congestion of suburban roofs, each one separated from its neighbour by what the builder regrettably calls a ' worm.'

And yet it is not London. For London has yet to burst upon our eyes, in the shape of strident Clapham Road, or Brixton Road, true London of the black, greasy pavement and the orange peel of which Private Ortheris babbled in his delirium. We have still to come to the giant warehouses and their ambitious grayness, to the flat mass of gray, yellow, and black, broken only

by the washing that hangs to dry, and the narrow gardens where droops the nasturtium. At last here is working London, little, nestling, hard, grimy London, gritty, troglodyte London, London of crowded shop and public-house, of tramway and clotted traffic, and yelping children. That is London of many heads and, to me, all smiling.

It is only later, when at last we reach the river that is gray as a cygnet, and see London rising in a hundred solemn spires, that we come to understand London, to feel the use of that white, central pomp; as well of that opulence as of the smiling cleanliness of the outer ring, of the blackness of the inner ring. For all that is part of London's world, and it is well that she should, within herself, comprise all ugliness and all beauty. For this makes her worth exploring.

The secret of a city's exploration does not lie in the dutiful following of itineraries, but rather in a lover-like submission to its moods. One should eat in various places, not only within the stereotyped square mile which, in London, in Paris, or in Petrograd, is loudly labelled as the foreigner's restaurant. One must seek culinary adventure far afield, at Harrow, and at Tulse Hill, in Piccadilly and Norton Folgate; and let me assure you that there exists a subtle difference between the cooking at the Cheapside A.B.C. and its fellow in the Brixton Road.

Also one should readily cede to the fancy that is bred by a beautiful place name. It is true that, as a rule, the most attractive names lead to the least attractive places, but on the way one touches singularity often, and beauty sometimes. My Baedeker has always been Kelly's Directory; that is one of the books I should like to find in my restricted library if I were wrecked on a desert island. For, sitting under my bread-fruit tree, warm in my garment of yakskin, and smoking an earthen pipe of dried I don't know what leaf, Kelly's Directory would bring up dreams, dreams such as these: Seven Sisters' Road, Satchwell Rents, Beer Lane, and Whetstone Park. All those dreams have come true, and thus a little of my fervour has been abated by their materialisation; by the discovery of Seven Sisters' Road as gray, refuse-strewn, rich

CUMBERLAND
HAY-MARKET

in Victorian goodness and in modern slum; of Satchwell Rents as a dusty affluent into Bethnal Green Road, shuttered, and locked, and suspicious. Whetstone Park, of course, is not at Whetstone, but just off New Oxford Street, and there is no park there. But still, those names, like Orme Square, that secludes itself from the Bayswater Road behind its column and its defiant eagle, like Cumberland Market, Hanoverian, naked, whose many iron posts await cattle that never come, contain the seed of romance because they induce quest. And so I will not be discouraged yet, but soon must discover what stones have wrought Jedburgh Street and Parsifal Road.

Yet those streets, and roads, and squares that have their place in Kelly are, after all, only the outer shell which the true lover must break through. If he is a true lover, he will soon understand that London lies behind the streets. He will realise that between two streets there is often more than two rows of houses and of gardens or yards. He will have discovered that in the core of those blocks of masonry lives an inner London. Into that core there is but one way, which I will call the slits. We all know slits, little spaces between houses, that lead inwards, you know not whither. You pass them every day, perhaps, and never turn aside, yet through those slits is the way in. There is one, for instance, near Notting Hill Gate. They call it Bulmer Place, though it is only six feet broad and is buried under an archway. Enter; ten yards lead you to an old cottage settlement, where no house exceeds two floors, where each has its garden, its creeper and its cat, where washing floats undisturbed, and, on fine afternoons, public beanoes take place. This is an old London village, caught between the warehouses and shops, yet maintained by the magic law of ancient lights.

There is another slit, less well known, quite near Kensington Square. To the ordinary eye, Kensington Square is entirely civilised, and none live there unless they have both money and good taste. In the far south-west corner stands a convent, that stares forth blankly upon this world. But walk south-east and turn to the right, and go on until, past low, white cottages grown

with sterile vine, you meet a brick wall. On the way, small houses, well locked, that are quiet and green, will have seen you pass without approval. If adventure is not for you, you will turn back on seeing the brick wall; if, however, it is, you will go on, and, on your right, find a slit so small that you may not open your umbrella in it. This they call South End; if you persevere you shall come to rustic cottages of plaster, and at last discover, single-floored against the side of a great block of flats, the cottage and garden where rot two old green, painted figure-heads. There live Prunella, Mityl, Selysette, and their tribe. But go carefully to South End, for the road is fugitive, and I cannot always find it myself. I think I find it only on the days when I am not too impure in heart.

Wherever flows London stone the slits exist. A deep, dark archway out of Surrey Street dives under the Norfolk Hotel; follow it, go down Surrey Steps, and you shall come to a water-gate, on which you may yet lean and smell the tar of Henry Fitz Alwyn's barge. Another slit, behind the Alexandra Hotel, will lead you through Old Barrack Yard (I do not know what barrack) and past low, industrial cottages, to the petrified splendours of Belgravia. I wish I knew them all, for I discovered yet another last week, after overlooking it for over sixteen years. It is called St James's Market, and leads off the Haymarket, towards the neat elegancies of Jermyn Street. That does not sound promising; yet, lost among the backs of warehouses and restaurants, there stands a long, low house coated with *green* plaster; it is a workshop, but some sense of fitness had bidden the workers relieve its green walls with claret curtains. I choose to be sure that in this house Axford tried to imprison Hannah Lightfoot, until the fair Quakeress fled to her Georgian lover.

And follow the green spot on the map, on the borough map, that cares so much for the borough, so little for the town. The borough map will lead you to green fields where flourish the sardine tin and the wild hyacinth. It will lead you to a church-yard, itself buried between theatres and shops, behind St Ann's,

Soho, where King Theodore of Corsica has laid his insurgent bones. It will lead you behind the solemnities of South Paddington into the vast churchyard behind the little Chapel of the Ascension. This is open to you all day; there you will find sparse graves, vast lawns and, under the trees, friendly seats where you may dream of death, or, if you prefer, of loves that will companion you to that bourne.

II
PLAYGROUNDS

CHAPTER II

PLAYGROUNDS

It is strange that the theatre should matter in a nation such as ours, which has gained a reputation for liberalism and tolerance, being tolerant because it cared for nothing, and liberal because it understood little. The vogue of the theatre reflects the character of urban England, which is as frivolous as that of urban Italy is dour; because it is the symbol of pleasure, easily attained and still more easily digested, it can always find room in the newspaper, where the affairs of the nation flicker and the claims of art are unmet. For let there be no confusion: art and the theatre are not the same thing; almost one might say that if a play possesses artistic quality it holds a passport to eternity, with this difference, that many things lost in eternity are remembered. A little more may be said of this further on.

London has always been a city of theatres, perhaps because we have, for many centuries, laboured under the Puritan tradition: its bitterness has attached to the theatre a glamour foreign to it in hotter lands. When you open a book of memoirs by an Italian, a German, or a Russian, you may be sure that it will consist in portraits of politicians, biographies of cocottes, stories of riots and coronations, but if at Hatchards you peer into any volume called *My Life*, or something like that, you will almost invariably discover that the greater part of the author's life seems to have been employed in meeting Sir Henry Irving, or waiting outside the Adelphi on first nights. The theatre, you see, is wicked and winning; the most august of the augustine, Messrs Coutts and Co., stamp upon their cheques their old sign: 'At the "Three Crowns" in the Strand, next door to the Globe Theatre, A.D. 1692.' I will wager those three crowns that no bank manager would ever think of advertising on his cheques: 'Next door to Westminster Abbey.' Why this should be is not entirely explained by the Puritan tradition, and it is still less explained by the London theatres themselves, nearly all of them, the meanest, dirtiest,

dingiest, fustiest, frowstiest edifices in the country. This is true, whether you pass from Drury Lane, that cave of winds, to 'behind,' at the Kingsway, where the oldest rabbit would get lost. Indeed, our theatres must have been influenced by the Puritan tradition, for everything has been done to hide their addresses in the papers, to make their doors invisible, their seating suitable for a Christian martyr. There is not in London a pre-Boer War theatre the pit of which is not summed up by Rutland Barrington's song: 'You bark your shins, you bang your head, your knees are up to your nose in bed . . .' and so on. They are so arranged that people delicately place their feet in the small of your back, so that nobody can enter the middle of a row without disturbing it, or leave it without infuriating it; as for the rakes, in spite of the matinée hat, I suspect that they have been planned to encourage expensive transfers. Of course, the worst theatres are those which are known as the 'good old' ones. There is no such thing as good old. There is nothing but bad old, and the theatre is an example. It must have been that heathen god, Good Old, invented Covent Garden. Good Old got it up in red and gold (Good Old would); Good Old planned the slips, which on one side let you hear all the strings and on the other all the brass. Good Old says it is cheap for half a crown. Good Old planned Drury Lane and laid it down where no buses pass. And, no doubt, Good Old handed over what was then Her Majesty's Theatre to Shakespeare as dramatised by Beerbohm Tree.

Some of the old London theatres, it is true, are a little less repulsive because they are not quite so large. Thus, the Haymarket, the Royalty, and in a queer, insidious way old Sadler's Wells. Sadler's Wells has gone; there to-day upon the film cowboys race and rescue, and negroid heroines register their emotions, but not long ago it was one of the few pleasant places Good Old had bequeathed us, with its hemicycle of plush-backed stalls, its little boxes lined with an inch of plush and half an inch of dirt, its heavy red hangings, favourable to lovers, its preposterous plays of love, gold, faith, patriotism, and banana falls. You see, at Sadler's Wells, Good Old dated back to about 1780, while at

most of our theatres he has brought himself up to date, say to 1860, and has grown respectable; it has not agreed with him. When we consider the few new theatres that have been built, such as the Scala, the Little Theatre, the Ambassadors, we are sure that the old cannot be brought up to date. Like most old institutions, the English theatre can be reformed only by dynamite.

As in many human things, architecture is at fault. The playhouse is evolved from the Roman circus. But the circus offered a performance without scenery, which could be seen from all sides. When scenery came, it grew impossible to show the play except from one side, so as not to give away the mystery; thus we obtained the semi-circular auditorium, which would be quite satisfactory if it did not result in a perpetually partial view for one half of the audience. The old play was mainly pantomimic; when the play grew more articulate it became impossible to hear the words very far, and as the theatre could not spread outwards it spread upwards. Then chaos came, for rakes had to be so arranged as to enable people to see, and yet packed close under another tier. The result is sardines.

Indeed, when we consider what it labours against, it is remarkable that the theatre should be so healthy. Every year, well over half the plays that are put on enjoy less than six weeks' run, and if it were not notorious that bankruptcy is a profitable trade one would wonder how managers live. The managers seem to have done everything to achieve financial suicide. Especially during the last twenty years; notably stimulated by Mr Charles Frohman and Mr George Edwardes, they have indulged in an endless competition in expensive staging. It grew quite common for a play to cost £5000 to stage, and much more was spent sometimes. Now, that large sum was risked, not invested, and so the unfortunate manager had to pay his backers a heavy toll. I am sure he was entirely wrong, for audiences prefer plays to scenery, and Mr Cochran, one of the few managers who remembers that once upon a time he was a public, has proved this by staging a successful revue for about £150. Do not believe that I am a highbrow; I do not suggest that *A Little Bit of Fluff* should be staged without

scenery, but with curtains (though there is a lot in curtains, if discreetly drawn), but I do suggest that the more elaborate the scenery, the more the play is overlooked. Perhaps that is what the managers desire, and judging from the condition of modern drama, perhaps they are right. But I attribute to the managers no such profundities of psychology. Rather would I say that they know what the public wants, and one thing they know well: the public wants certain actors and wants them passionately.

I shall never forget a certain performance of *King Henry V.* There entered a man in silver armour, his visor down, and a gasping female by my side said: 'That's Lewis Waller.' And the worst of it is that she was right, and that I knew she was right. Visor or no visor, I too knew it was Lewis Waller; it was Lewis Waller, slamming and banging British drama as none better could than he, by insisting, in his silver armour, on being always Waller, never Henry V. They are all like that: Mr Gerald du Maurier may dress himself up as a policeman, or swathe his neck in a choker, or get into evening clothes and pretend to be a burglar, but thick over those artifices lies always the charming du Maurier trail. He is loved for that, just as Beerbohm Tree was loved for the confectionery of his voice and the circular movement of his hand, as Mr Hawtrey is loved for his sober cynicism, and Miss Doris Keane for . . . I don't know exactly what. Whatever actors are loved for, it is always for being themselves and never for being their parts; whether, like Miss Lilian Braithwaite, they have cast themselves for the lilies and languors of virtue, or, like Miss Dorothy Minto, for the roses and raptures of vice, to those selections they must cleave, or they shall be loved no more. But if they do cleave to these selves of theirs, then shall they attain fame, and the public will not say: 'Have you been to *Hamlet*?' but 'Have you seen Martin Harvey?' And this worship shapes yet another stone to hurl at the English theatre, namely, fantastic salaries, varying between £100 and £300 a week. Call me a Bolshevik if you like, but I say no man is worth £300 a week; nobody knows this when the man is alive, but everybody does the day after he is dead. This would not matter if it did

not make the theatre so expensive to run, therefore the prices of the seats so high that only those who can afford it sit in them. The richer the staging, the poorer the play; the dearer the seat, the greater its attraction to the people who know 'the price of everything and the value of nothing.' For long purses are made of sows' ears.

I wonder if something could be done for the theatre. Supposing it were built like the Scala, so that nobody sat at the sides, so that everybody might see the play instead of hats, so that one might have a fit in the stalls and be removed without causing too much trouble (you see, I think of everything), so that the people at the top were not seated so high as to observe mainly the actors' upper skulls. Supposing a theatre like the Munich Kammerspiele, which holds five hundred, were to be built. Supposing, like that one, it had but one balcony; supposing it were cheap to light; supposing, too, that it had no programme sellers, but delivered programmes at the doors from a penny-in-the-slot machine; supposing it had no cloak-room attendants, but hooks with a number and a padlock; supposing it had no . . . I forget the name of the attendant, something like pew-opener, and that the seats were not numbered from A.26 to M.34 in the stalls, not numbered at all in the pit, and re-numbered again in the upper circle; supposing the seats were just numbered 1, 2, 3, so that one could find them; supposing we paid actors for rehearsals and engaged them for a certain term; supposing all this, would the public be pleased? I wonder! I wonder whether the public would like paying less for its seats. If stalls did not cost 10s. 6d., would it trust the play? It certainly does not trust the doctor who charges less than 10s. 6d. And yet, once upon a time, the theatre was cheap. When, sixty years ago, Ben Webster was producing at the Adelphi, a stall cost 5s., and Mr Webster offered amphitheatre stalls 'with elbows and cushions, secured the whole evening' for 1s.

Yes, a good deal might be done like this. A good deal might be done by the Lord Chamberlain and the London County Council, if only they would cease to devote all their thoughts to exits from

the theatre. (On consideration, this may be well advised.) They might allow smoking, and best of all, they might allow everything, suspend all censorship, and be assured that the plays which are called objectionable would not be staged. I do not mean that there is no demand for objectionable plays; there is; indeed, we nearly all of us like objectionable plays, but the Puritans can trust our Puritan feeling, which makes it impossible for us to enjoy objectionable plays because we dare not be seen enjoying them by other people who are also enjoying them. Ah! if you could go to the play masked it would be different.

What is wrong with the drama is that it does not hold an idea to the square act; is it worth saving? For it may truly be said that the only fault the public finds in a stupid play is that it is not stupid enough. You do not believe me. Let us look at the list of plays in to-day's paper. To-day there are open thirty-six metropolitan theatres, including some we can leave out, Maskelyne's, Drury Lane (Opera), the Philharmonic. Of the remaining thirty-three, musical comedy occupies six stages. Say no more about that. If it were not for the lips that sing, our attention would be concentrated on English music. Revue rages at five theatres. This leaves twenty-two plays running. Among them are two spy plays, two comic war plays, a mystical melodrama, four farces; the rest consists in plays made by hands unassisted by heads, plays that the next generation may make by machinery. The groans of old age are heard as Sir Arthur Pinero rigs *The Freaks* upon their legs, as Mr Somerset Maughan presents *Love in a Cottage*. And *Dear Brutus* is the twinkling star that makes darker the Thalian night.

In hardly one of these plays is there a single moment of intellectual distinction. I do not mean that I ask those twenty-two stages to make up the night's programme of *King Lear*, *Ghosts*, *Les Trois Filles de Monsieur Dupont*, the *Sunken Bell*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, but I do think that their coalition might give us more than *Dear Brutus*. There should be plenty of room for true comedy of the type of *The Admirable Crichton*, *Mrs Gorringe's Necklace*, *John Bull's Other Island*, *The Cassilis*

Engagement, *Chains*, comedy with ideas. There should be room for *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnett*, *The Playboy of the Western World* and other solid plays. But one condition is that we should pay for plays, not players. We do not. If you want evidence consider the following advertisement of *When Knights were Bold* (a really amusing play):—

WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD.

BROMLEY CHALLENOR	'Bromley Challenor has a personality and fun of his own.'—*Times*.
	'An individual style of his own.'—*Daily Telegraph*.
	'A manner quite his own.'—*The Queen*.
	'Nothing funnier than the second act.'—*Daily Telegraph*.
	'His fun is infectious.'—*Daily Graphic*.
	'Keeps his audience in convulsions.'—*Star*.
	'Had a triumphant reception.'—*Daily Chronicle*.
	'Bromley Challenor extracts every spark of fun.'—J. T. GREIN, *Sunday Times*.
	'The play went more gloriously than ever.'—*Referee*.
MARJORIE BELLAIRS	'Miss Marjorie Bellairs is a charming actress with a singularly sweet voice.'—*Era*.

Ten press quotations. Two refer to the play; one may refer to play or to actor; seven refer to the actor only. (The playwright is not mentioned, but never mind). This does not mean that the newspapers confined their notices to Mr Bromley Challenor, but it does mean that the management selected for quotation only the phrases which refer to the actor, because that is what the public wants, and what it gets for the hastening of its mental decay.

What is wrong with the theatre is, to a certain extent, right

with the music-hall, and this for two reasons: we have to deal with a different kind of playgoer, and the excessive valuation of the actor is sharply limited by the worth of his songs. I have seen Ernie Mayne, Ella Shields, and others rouse the house with one song and half-fail with another. The theatre-goer, who, on the whole, is not a music-hall-goer, is usually either in a smug condition, or over-conscious of his digestive process. Nearly all the pit and upper circle, and the bulk of the dress circle, feel that they are indulging in a respectable spree. Leaving aside the one who, in the newspapers, signs his letters as ' Old Playgoer ' (generally an old fool), or ' Old Firstnighter,' probably an old lunatic (because the first night is the worst night), the cheaper seats in a theatre are tenanted mainly by people in a stupefied state of admiration. They have escaped for a few hours from the dug-outs of respectability; their families have not long emerged from the tradition that the theatre is a place of evil repute; some even believe that they are improving their minds, which is touching, whatever the condition of their minds. They file their programmes. They loudly proclaim to their friends that they ' ought ' to go and see such and such a play. Perhaps they go because they ought to. Perhaps they go to dream dreams; no doubt nightmares do not disappoint them. The stalls are not in search of virtue tempered with a little vice; most of their patrons are confessedly in search of vice neat. They never get it. And if this vice, invisible to anybody who is not a bishop or the editor of a Sunday paper, is necessary to their health, it is because they visit the theatre in a state of advanced repletion, because they are people who manage to be replete in the middle of a European war; such is their nature. No wonder, then, that the cold suet of the drama should have so securely become wrapped in the wet dish-cloth of the playgoer. Thus, it may be true to say that the playgoer gets the plays he deserves. The music-hall-goer is different.

If it is true that many go to the theatre when they have eaten too much, it is, to a certain extent, true that many go to the music-hall when they have drunk too much, which, if I must choose, is less repulsive. They are frankly out for a rag; they want to

laugh, and I had rather they guffawed than drowsed. You can't drowse in a music-hall: from the moment when the conductor, in his elaborately luxurious and irremediably faulty dress suit, addresses his first and infinitely disabused bow to the audience, to the time when he calls upon the band to produce the smallest possible scrap of 'God Save the King,' and hurries out loyalty on the wings of ragtime, there is no flagging. It is not only that red-nosed comedian and eccentric comedienne, American dancer, or sketch got up regardless, tread upon each other's heels; the main thing is the band, the harsh, rapid band, that never stops, that plays anything, providing it is the thing of the day, with all the regularity and indifference of the typewriter. From it gush patriotism, comedy or sentiment, and all three burst forth with their full headline value. There is no tickling of big drums; when the drum is banged you know it; nor is there measure in the sigh of the oboe, for the music-hall paints not in wash-greens and grays; scarlet, black, white, and electric-blue are its gamut.

Nothing else would satisfy the audience that every music-hall comedian must encounter every night. It is a mixed audience. There are old stagers who sit in the same seat every Saturday night, without looking at the programme, and this differentiates them from the playgoer: they are bound for a playground. There are the discriminating who follow the star, so long as the star's songs refrain from appealing to what is described as their better feelings; there are the very young in search of excitement, and determined to get it; there are the slightly older, who come in pairs, and do nothing to conceal the fact. (Of late years, many of these have been lost to the music-halls and have taken to the cinemas because they are darker.) But one thing unites them all: they have come here to be amused, amused at once, amused all the time; they are not ready to make allowances; if an old song is a good song, it is a good song, but if it is not a good song the seasoned music-hall-goer will know it at once. I have heard him turn to his neighbour and say: 'It's all up. She won't get across.' Getting across the footlights is not, in a music-hall, the

same thing as getting across in a theatre. The music-hall performer has no scenery to help him, in this sense, that the properties are well known to the audience. I have seen at least twenty turns at the Shepherd's Bush Empire in front of a drop-curtain which I swear is Croydon High Street. The words of the song are, as a rule, difficult to sing. Often, as in the case of George Robey, the costume is stereotyped and never varies. Thus the music-hall performer, having not the scenery of Harry Hope, or the knee-breeches of Malvolio, can rely on nothing but himself. He comes naked into an entirely cold world. His situation is ideally expressed by the old cartoon of the impresario, his foot bound up to show that he has gout. Before him stands the dingy figure of a little performer. This is their dialogue:—

Impresario: 'What's your line?'
Performer: 'Comedian.'
Impresario: 'Well! get on with it! Make me laugh.'

If within one minute of his appearance the performer has not got his laugh he will probably not get it at all. If he is famous, and if his turn is not too bad, nothing worse will happen than the administration of the frozen lemon. It is rather tragic, feeling the lemon come. You feel the audience leap up towards the performer, for it is always ready to give him his chance, even if he is unknown; then, in a minute or so, you feel the audience drop away from him; you are aware that he is not being listened to, for people begin to talk, to flutter with their programmes, and perhaps some one may hum an irrelevant air. The wretched performer knows it. If you are sitting in the first row of the stalls you see anxiety come over his face. He begins to shout or to dance rather wildly; he knows that he is not getting across; he tries to attract attention as a cockatoo if he cannot do so as an eagle. Then some one laughs derisively, and there is something hideous in that laughter; it makes one think of the thumb-down attitude in the Roman circus. The curtain drops in the middle of something that is half hum and half silence. That is the lemon.

It is only in extreme cases that the audience manifests disapproval. Indeed, it is an audience full of good-natured contempt, and if the lemon is taken it willingly passes on to the next turn; as a rule, the lemon is taken by the management, who ring down the curtain on the first song and do not let the performer come on again. But if the performer does come on again, and strives to recapture lost ground, the audience will give him thirty seconds to do it; if he fails, the hum grows angry as that of a swarm of bees. There is more derisive laughter; a few yells come from the gallery; a general uproar develops from the hum. You discern cries: 'I want to go 'ome' . . . 'Take me back to mother.' . . . Opponents reply as loudly: 'Shut up! chuck him out!' But the voices resume in more and more sepulchral tones: 'I want to go 'ome,' while others join the rag for the rag's sake, and some stentor high above roars: 'Shut yer face, dear, I see yer Christmas dinner.' And then everybody cries: 'Chuck him out! while the performer sings louder and louder, and the band makes still more desperate efforts to drown his song. Then a large portion of the audience rise to their feet and bellow enmity until the curtain goes down. That is the scarlet bird, and I have not often seen it on the wing.

No, there is no mercy in the music-hall audience. For it is an honest audience, and is, therefore, capable of every brutality. Also, everybody has paid for his seat. Nobody there can afford to waste that small payment. They must get their money's worth. They know exactly what they want; they have been wanting it ever since the Middle Ages, and, on the whole, have been getting it. They want rough and obvious jokes told in a subtle and intelligent way; they want to see the performer break plates or sit on the butter, but he must do it in a debonair style; they want songs of which they know the tune by the time the second couplet is reached, favourite songs of which they can bellow the choruses while the triumphant performer whispers it; above all, they want their traditional jokes. Cheese, lodgers, mothers-in-law, twins, meeting the missus at 3 a.m., alcoholic excess, one or more of these must be introduced to make a

successful song. It does not matter who you are, whether the great McDermott, Dan Leno, or R. G. Knowles, you must tie your little bark to the great ship of the English music-hall tradition. No famous song has become famous unless a portion of it at least dealt with one of these subjects: 'Champagne Charlie,' 'I'm following in father's footsteps,' 'The Girl, the Woman, and the Widow,' are clear evidences of this. Perhaps that is why some delicate artists, such as Maidie Scott and Wish Wynne, have never quite 'got there.' Maidie Scott is the most finished product on the music-halls of to-day. As soon as she comes on, her quick, schoolgirl walk, her red hair, her *distrait* eyes, and the voice which she knows so amazingly how to keep down to a minor key, cut her right out of the stage. When Maidie Scott sings 'Amen,' or 'Father's got the sack from the water-works' (all along of his cherry briar pipe, because they were afraid he'd set the water-works on fire), and still more when she sings, 'I'm glad I took my mother's advice,' one has a sense of extraordinary detachment. She is aloof, alone. She is so entirely under restraint; knows so well how, at last, to let her voice swell and underline her point; she knows so well how not to waste during a song the power of her splendid blue eyes, but to reserve them for that final point. Thus she should wield astonishing power, yet does not quite; she lacks grossness; like Wish Wynne, her art is a little too delicate to get across. The audience like her, they like Wish Wynne singing 'Oo! er!' and miserably dragging her little tin trunk, but never for either do they rise and roar as they do for Marie Lloyd.

It is true that Marie Lloyd takes us into another world, that of the comfortable public-house, with plenty of lights and red plush; to the publican's dog-cart off to the Derby; to the large birthday party, enlivened by plenty of sherry wine. In Marie Lloyd's world everything is fat, healthy, round, jolly, bouncing; when she keeps the old man's trousers to remember him by after he's gone, she defines the human quality of her sentiment: she can do nothing false and artificial, such as pressing his nuptial button-hole. Marie Lloyd is a woman before she is an actress, and in

this lies her strength. When she advises the audience to ' 'Ave a little bit of what yer fancy (if you fancy it, if you fancy it), 'Ave a little bit of what yer fancy, I say it does yer good,' Marie Lloyd is expressing the eternal claim of the flesh against the spirit, which has been rediscovered a great many times since Epicurus. She survives a great generation; there is nobody to-day fit to wear her pleasantly-little shoes.

There is nobody, because the spirit of the music-hall is changing, and women, who are more adaptable than men, are feeling it first. An awful thing is happening to most of the young women on the halls; they are becoming refined. Louie and Toots Pounds, Ella Retford, Clarice Mayne, Ella Shields, have nothing of the Marie Lloyd tradition; they are almost creatures of the drawing-room. Even Beattie and Babs, though Babs does what she can with stockings that nothing will ever keep up, never seem to experience the thick joy of being alive that Marie Lloyd conveys in one slow, sidelong raising of her immortal eyelid. There is, perhaps, a white hope, Daisy Wood, but one cannot be sure. They sing well, these young women, they dance well; they do it too well; women of the older tradition, such as Victoria Monks and Nellie Wallace are still themselves: they do not do it so well, but they do it. These are not trained, like the young women, but they have grown up and discovered themselves; they do not *act* joy or distress: they cut joy or distress out of common life and lay it down on the bare planks. All that is going, for the music-hall is growing refined.

Let me dispel a possible misunderstanding. When I say music-hall I do not mean those sinks of virtue, the Coliseum, or the Palladium, the Palace, and the Hippodrome. Those are royal theatres of varieties, eminently suited for long skirts and acrobats, and large enough for elephants. Two of them can safely be handed over to revue, and the rest is silence. I have seen Mr George Robey, I forget whether it was at the Palladium or the Coliseum, and the place was so broad, and so deep, and so high, that his eyebrows looked normal: can I add anything to the horror of this picture? The only comedian who ever seemed to me a

success in those barns was Little Tich, as little Miss Turpentine, because they made him still smaller, which heightened his effect. But those halls pay large salaries, and I suppose they will go on. Indeed, I fear that they are gaining ground because we are daily sinking deeper in the Joseph Lyons civilisation, where everything must be cheap, gilt, and enormous. The old halls, the Holborn, the Metropolitan, the Bedford, Collins's, will not last long; already many halls have been seized, the Tivoli and the Canterbury by cinemas, the Shepherd's Bush, I think the Paragon, Mile End, and certainly the Shoreditch Empire by Sir Oswald Stoll. We have to count with Sir Oswald Stoll. Together with Sir Joseph Lyons, he has done more to drive out Merrie England than the dourest champion of methodism. You can go to his music-halls, or to the Palladium, which is not a Stoll hall, but a stollomorphe, and nothing will offend your good taste. During the last dozen years Sir Oswald Stoll has been engaged in a continuous and painfully successful campaign to raise the English music-hall; he has almost succeeded in elevating it. True, in his halls appear all those men who carry on the old tradition and glorify the flesh: George Robey, Sam Stern, Ernie Mayne, Sam Mayo, who sing the crude joy of poor life, which is found in drunken sprees and conjugal misunderstandings, but which yet is true life. Little by little their songs grow less broad. Sam Mayo would not, at a Stoll hall, sing the ditty which used to delight the old Middlesex: 'Ching chang, wing wang, bing, bang, boo,' nor would Dutch Daly sing about the larks in May. Our old comedians are limiting their humours, discolouring their noses, rolling their umbrellas. The young ladies in the audience, and their young gentlemen, modern forms of the donah and her bloke, would feel uncomfortable if too crudely reminded that love is something more than kisses on Brighton Pier under a pale pink sunshade. The old comedians are not yet dead, and Ernie Mayne can still sing:—

'Last night I wandered thro' the park,
I met a female after dark;
And, feeling faint for want of food,

I fell into her arms—how rude!
Just then she murmured " Kiss me,
George! " her face I chanced to see,
The girl was black, with nigger lips;
I shouted, " Not for me! "
It's my meatless day, my meatless day,
I'm not going to eat any sort of meat.
Meat, meat, meat, meat,
I'm thin and pale, all I've put away
Is two roly-polies, never left a crumb,
Three currant puddings and a little bit of plum,
And five apple-dumplings are rolling round my tum,
'Cos it's my meatless day.'

Yes, Ernie Mayne may still sing his songs of Araby, but little by little he is being borne down by the American raconteur, whose impropriety is always in the best of taste, by the ragtime dancer, by the wandering Italian fiddler, by the respectable eccentric at the piano, by the juggler, by the refined soprano, who sings ' God send you back to me, over the mighty sea,' or, ' There's a little mother always yearning for the ones that long to roam.' It's all getting so clean, so precious pure. The old comedian will not last long. He that was once a bull in a china-shop will soon become a Stolled ox.

But the worst may yet have to come. A new demon is arising in the shape of the cinema. It is as if Merrie England, that once lived at the Surrey Theatre and the Globe, and was driven out when the middle class began to frequent the theatre about 1870 and took refuge in the caves of harmony, then doubled back into the Tivoli and the Oxford (fortunately to provide what the late W. T. Stead called ' drivel for the dregs '), were being pursued. Wherever Merrie England goes, it seems that, as Mark Sheridan used to put it, ' the villain thtill purthued her, purthued her, purthued her.' When the music-hall has been completely improved I wonder whether he will be glad to have ' purthued her ' to such good purpose. Certainly, in the cinemas, little is left of the old

spirit that arose as one drank one's beer in the stalls at the old Mogul, for the cinema, let police magistrates say what they like, bears deep upon its brow the brand of Abel.

The cinema, like most new and virile things, has split opinion, and has collected round itself more unwise friends and unthinking enemies than any other form of entertainment. Few people like cinemas; they either love them or loathe them, while a few, I suppose, fall into my section of feeling and hate them for not being better than they are. For I believe in the cinema; I do not think that the cinema will do away with the theatre and the novel, but I do believe that it is destined to play a still larger part in the amusement of the people. Also, I believe that it is destined to play a cleaner, that is, a more artistic part. How far it can be brought, I do not know, because I do not suppose that I am the one chosen by nature to raise it high; but if we consider films such as *The Birth of a Nation*, or *Intolerance*, where Mr D. W. Griffith, a man of some slight culture, is not entirely devoid of taste, and certainly bold in his conceptions, audacious in his execution, we cannot wave the cinema away with a sneer at cowboy drama.

The cinema began with cowboy drama, with silly pursuits on horseback, by motor-car and by train, but that was only because, for the first time, movement could be reproduced. The reproduction of movement was a new pleasure, and so the mob clamoured for it. Carry yourself back to your first film and, be you as highbrowed as you like, you will not deny that you enjoyed those febrile races, those people falling out of windows, crashing through ceilings, the violent opening and shutting of doors, the rush of flying crockery. Then you grew tired of it and began to think it silly. Well, it was silly, and it is silly, but we should remember that the pioneers of the cinema were Americans of the travelling-showman type, men whose fathers had exhibited the *camera obscura* loved of our fathers; they had passed through dissolving views, and that type of man could not be expected to like, and therefore to put forward, a dramatic version of *Paradise Lost*. Briefly, the cinema was put forward by the vulgar, for the

vulgar, but by degrees, as the mob grew weary of movement for movement's sake, as the profits increased, new men such as Pathé, Urban, Gaumont, came in. They were commercial men, but not vulgar men, men who realised that if there was a public for the novels of Mr E. F. Benson and the plays of Mr Alfred Sutro, there must be a cinema public for something less lurid than the early films. By degrees, the cinema improved; it improved in conceptions when subjects such as *Quo Vadis?*, *The Walls of Jericho*, *Bella Donna*, appeared on the film; yet more ambitious things were done in the shape of *Hamlet*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Justice*, *Intolerance*, and many more.

The film improved, too, in its actual execution. The earliest type of film actor was scraped up from the East Side gutters of New York and the graving-docks of Naples. For that early cinema you needed creatures immensely unrestrained, yelling, dancing, dirty creatures, not at all the people who could have impersonated what the old lady in the pit called the 'married life of the dear Queen.' And as the subjects changed the actors changed; many were taken from the stage; some, to this day, preserve certain characteristics of the ordinary human being. It is not quite their fault if they do not preserve them all; the cinema has had time to make a tradition of its own, which is still represented by the American posters we see upon the walls, where the heroines have enormous eyes and more teeth than Lulu Dentifrice; where the young men have straight backs to their heads, half a pound of white meat on each cheek, a rugged brow, or an emetic grin, briefly, the most brutal type of Chicago commercial rigged out in the dress clothes of a suicide; where ladies whose clothing is too low for blouses and too high for evening frocks, whose jewels flash beyond the dreams of Gophir, quaff the sparkling champagne wine. Where the illustrator manages to make Miss Irene Vanbrugh look vulgar. Where American policemen (or admirals, you never know) arrest crooks in mid-air; where all is six-shooters, bowie-knives, cinches, and snarks. Like poster like player, is, to a certain extent, true, for the producer is still a cross between Pimple and the sort of stockbroker whose silk

hat glitters in eight places. (Observe the band on his cigar.) But that producer, like that poster, is the old tradition, and is giving way before the ordinary business man who does not see the world in terms of banana falls. That new man is not pressing his actors as the old producer did. He still makes them register, but less intensely. Register means to mark the emotions. When the hero is being filmed, and the heroine enters, he smiles; if he does not smile beatifically enough the producer will cry to him: 'Register delight!' You have all seen the result. In the old days they were registering all the time; you could see the heroine registering terror, while the hero registered nobility, and the villain registered hate; meanwhile, the old mother dropped a stitch and registered benevolence with extreme pertinacity, and, all the time, servants in the background were registering national pride and rectitude. One still has to do these things on the cinema because, after all, the cinema picture has to be photographable. It has to be seen rather plainly, but the cinema producer has begun to understand that, to be effective, facial expression need not be recognisable a mile away.

It is the excessive vigour of the cinema has endeared it to Londoners; most of them are a rather lymphatic crowd, because they live in too large a city, surrounded by too many interesting things, because they eat rather bad food and not enough of it, and also because most of them work in stuffy offices and factories. Thus they need strong stimuli if they are to react, and no doubt that is why cinemas are being established one by the side of the other, and run for ten hours a day. Like the sensational stories in the magazines, like the newspapers which consist in much headline and little text, they spur this tired creature. The more he is spurred, the more tired he grows. The more tired he grows, the more he needs spurring. So the cinema must prosper. But I think it will prosper in a more moderate way; it will continue to grow, to absorb theatres and music-halls; it has already absorbed the Coronet, the Canterbury, Sadler's Wells, the Tivoli, the Scala, the London Opera House, and others; but I think it will more and more tend to produce the historical film, films based

on novels and plays of some slight merit; that it will increasingly provide bearable music. For a while it may not originate much, and therefore it will not easily become a form of art. I am not sure that it can become a form of art, though I do not know why: the ballet is a form of art, and people like Nijinsky, Pavlova, Madame Rambert (let alone Taglioni and Genée) have made a great deal of it. I do not say that it is impossible for the cinema to produce a work of art, but this must be within the limits of pantomime, which are close and narrow limits. Subtle emotions it cannot express, for pantomime cannot figure that 'she thought this, because she thought that he thought that.' (If a cinema company will film *The Golden Bowl*, I will burn seven candles as an offering to the Albert Memorial.) All that, the cinema must leave to the play and the novel. It cannot risk wearying the audience by leaving it for half an hour before the same scene; the theatre can do that because the voices of the actors afford relief; the cinema, being unable to reproduce footsteps, is compelled to reproduce flying feet. Because it cannot speak, it must move, and so it is a different kind of thing.

That does not mean that it need always be the rather crude thing it is to-day. As people of better taste come into the business, we are likely to do away with a few of the continual changes of scene; we shall reduce repetitions, such as the woman who endlessly rocks the baby's cradle between every tragic scene in *Intolerance*. Repetition is the way in which a crude taste rams its point home; a fine taste will select its points better, need to make them less obvious, know how to vary them. The selective art of the novelist can thus be applied. Also, the finer taste will not corrupt the actor as hitherto he has been corrupted, by leading him into a wilderness of monkeys. The cinema will learn restraint, that first need of all art. Some of the actors, such as Norma Talmadge, Pauline Frederick, Mary Pickford, and especially Charlie Chaplin, have already evolved a new form of acting, and not a mean one. When Charlie Chaplin runs along a road, in that queer, lolloping way which starts from the shoulders and animates his fingers and his elbows, chasing a Rolls-Royce that is

obviously travelling at a hundred and twenty miles an hour, when thereupon he falls into a ditch, and extricates himself with an air of incredulity, when he then appears to realise, with a detachment that none but Plato could have equalled, that he is not likely to catch that car, and decides to go home, Charlie Chaplin does a wonderful thing: he turns his back on the audience, and you know, from a little ripple in his back that he is considering the situation. Then the head gives a jerk, one of the shoulders goes up, the fingers give a twist, and long before Charlie Chaplin turns round to face the audience, with his soft eyes laughing, his animate body has told you what he meant: ' It's gone. Oh, well, I don't care.' The popularity of others may wane, but Charlie Chaplin is a monument. As in the case of the music-halls, a merciless audience has formed, and its love has readily been given to the best.

III
THE FRIENDLY BOWL

CHAPTER III

THE FRIENDLY BOWL

HARD things are said of the London public-house. It is dirty; it is dingy; there is nothing to sit on; there is nothing to read; it possesses neither intellect nor domino set; it is not a place where a man can take his wife and family; it should be improved, it should be suppressed (subtle distinction), and so on. The curious side of these assaults is that the people who rave at the public-house are not the people one sees in it, and one wonders whether they passionately desire public-houses after their own heart, and, presumably, for their own use. I have visions of the public-house of their dreams, æsthetic and antiseptic, furnished, according to persuasion, with Fabian tracts, or tracts of greater orthodoxy. I imagine a staid crowd in that reformed public-house, let us say, the Reverend Dr Horton and party, quaffing the foaming cider-cup and discussing the principles of reconstruction; Mr Sidney Webb and Mr Bernard Shaw passionately engaged at spillikins . . . and the working man in the modest background.

The idea has little attraction, because, frankly, I like the London public-house, just as I like the Paris café and the German beer-hall. I do not see why we should make our public-houses into Parisian cafés, for our needs differ from those of Parisians, and we do not, among other things, visit public-houses to play dominoes or to read *The Spectator*. Men go to public-houses to drink, either because they are thirsty, or because they like drink. Notably, the working man goes there to be rid of that wife and family of which he sees quite enough. I know it is difficult for the well-to-do man, whose house contains ten rooms, who has a private room at his office, and a sulking chair at his club, to understand that the working man, who generally lives in two rooms with several children and the scented memory of many meals, should want to escape this felicitous atmosphere. It may also strike him as strange that the working man should not, after

a ten-hour day, relish 'a good, brisk walk.' Also, he does not realise that ours is not yet a kid-glove civilisation, and that most of our working people like the sensual life. Being Anglo-Saxons, they are largely impervious to art, and rather crude in love; so their sensuality finds an outlet in drink. You may deplore this sensuality, but it is no use trying to stem it by making distasteful the conditions under which it is indulged; the way to stem it is to make a change in the creature, by treating it as a man, by paying it as a citizen, and by granting it justice instead of favour, education instead of teaching.

A new English people will make a new public-house; to-day, they have the public-house they deserve, and it is not such an evil place as some like to make out. Pellucid reader, have you ever visited The Green Man? The Red Lion? or The Bedford Head? Do you know the brew of The Warrington and The Horseshoe's chop? I like their busy bars, so cunningly stratified into public bar, private bar, and saloon. They are a microcosm of English society, where everybody keeps himself to himself, where every class is defiled by every other class because the one beneath is 'low,' and the one above 'stuck up.' In England, classes barely establish internal toleration. There are few equals inside classes. One either looks up or looks down, and one never looks at. But in public-houses a rude toleration does exist. They are not unattractive, for rough friendship is included by every barmaid in the 'gin and peach.' One talks to people one does not know. If one stays, one may hear the history of their life. Nor are all public-houses ugly; there is a Dickensian, a Jacobean charm in the dazzle of their many glasses, in their piling bottles, their ash-trays presented by the brewer, their match-stands, a gift from the distiller, in the portraits of horses and dogs that proclaim the virtues of Johnny Walker, and Black and White. Aesthetically speaking, these articles are ugly, but they have a certain joviality which is not disagreeable.

It is a mistake to think that public-houses are all alike. No two places are alike; not even Lyons's depots are all alike, for

THE PUB

The next page >

the personality of the manageress reveals itself, say in strange arrangements of salt-cellars. The casual visitor may not find much difference between The Red Lion in the Harrow Road, The Hero of Maida, Bricklayers' Arms, or The Archway, and I will not stress it. But it would need a more than casual observer to overlook the spacious cleanliness of The Warrington, and its rather Victorian air of solid comfort; should he go to Rule's, or The Cheshire Cheese, he will be obsessed by the domestic fustiness of places that have escaped renovation for a century. Those old taverns reveal a London little older than fifty years, when no Ritz-Carltons were open, when the young man could join no club until he was a middle-aged one, and when he ate his meals in his rooms in Bury Street off soiled mahogany. These old places are traditional, and their ale is traditional. I suspect that it is a secret blend of old ale and new ale, the new being poured into the old casks, thus ever inheriting and ever bequeathing the virtues of the family.

And other inns have their temperament, which is that of their customers. Thus, at the public houses of London Wall, as also at Coates's Wine Bar, you never get away from the sense of business. These places are friendly, but wary. Likewise, at The Cock, in Fleet Street, there is more noise and less wariness, because here is an exchange for news, and occasionally for facts; farther on, at Shirreff's, the attraction is sound wine under sound arches. Shirreff's clientèle numbers rather obese people who know how to treat a glass of port. Thus should you treat a glass of port: let the glass be not quite full, so that the holy wine may have space in which to unwind its lovely surface; raise the glass, holding its stem so that the fingers may not break the amber oval of its form; then raise it to the level of the eyes, so that the pale light of the city may stream through that rich amber, and emerge transfigured; draw closer; respectfully breathe in the soft, insidious scent that rises to your nostrils like a prayer. Then only, when the golden ghost has spoken to all senses save that of taste, drink, and drink slowly, without haste, with respect, not as a vulgar man, thirsty, but as a man without thirst, and risen over

such necessity. Thus only shall you be companions of Amarante, Miranda, and Sabor.

If all drank with such elegance we might hear less of public-house reform. Of late years, attempts have been made to humanise the public-house; the first result has been to make it inhuman. I lead no attack upon the Public-House Trust and the People's Refreshment House Association. They are excellent bodies, and once upon a time I supported them, but as I grow older, I think I grow more depraved. I know it is not pleasant to see people drunk, though some are still more unpleasant when they are sober; I do not support the public-house in selling last week's sandwiches and last year's cheddar, but still . . . ale that hath no sting . . . and leadless glaze! Instinct wars with my reason; I see the public-houses grow more civilised, and a faint regret creeps over me that good intentions should get into beer.

It is true that at the other end of the scale luxury fights with good intentions and produces, well, not the abomination of desolation, but the greater abomination of delectation in the shape of the American bar. Already a young civilisation has produced its first-fruits, such as broncho busting, college yells, and cinema rides; already poets quaff from the foaming soda-fountain in Hippocrene City, Pa. (or possibly Minn.), and in the friendly bowl mix the cocktail. Magic word, eloquent in form! I cannot express what I owe to the cocktail: it provides half of what a dinner party needs, for it stimulates conversation. The other half is provided by bridge, for it stops this conversation. The power of the cocktail is not that of the pure in heart; it is a complex, a modern; it is a congress of alcohols; nothing is alien to it; nothing can hallow it; nothing can resist its repeated assaults. With all drinks it has affinity. It carries the bar sinister of all liqueurs. Bitters and curaçao, whisky and maraschino, brandy, vermouth and cassis, Fernet Branca, gentle raspberry, all of these; and crême de menthe, and gin, and absinthe, and apple-jack, these, too, are of its fiery soul, and apricot brandy that is like a blush, sherry like a burnt topaz, paprika to make you leap, and sly benedictine, dancing anisette, and port like a

minor canon, gins from Plymouth, and Schiedam, virginal grenadine, all can join with all the fruits the world has ever known, cherry, lemon, tangerine, olive, spray of tarragon too. And thus one begins a cocktail. Let your basis be gin ; enlist vermouth; let bitter and maraschino creep in: behold Martini! But expel the vermouth to substitute apricot brandy: then you have Hungarian. But if for you gin has no fire, then let your mainstay be rye whisky: its allies, bitter and vermouth, and Manhattan for you appears. And others for you shall rise, soda cocktail and love tree, or silver fizz, or blagden punch . . . or hot apple toddy. Treat not the cocktail rudely. Let all coalitions be gradual, and temper their fire with ground ice; then cast the whole in the silver mixer and shake, shake, shake. While you shake, meditate.

In English bars they neither shake nor meditate; they drink too uncritically the expression of the brewer's artistic temperament, and give forth too little of their own. But, still, they are pleasant enough, these bars, whether British, as the gloomily popular Leicester Lounge, or foreign as the Monico. They have all the well-bred indifference of the Englishman who asks you no questions because he seeks no answers, who makes no comments because he has nothing to say. You need, you pay, you are satisfied, you go. There is no revelry. For true revelry, the glass that sparkles and the jug that foams, you must go to some club at least a hundred years old, and in St James's Street or Pall Mall, where ' old man ' and ' old thing ' know each other's record and capacity, where, under an ancient roof, the prairie oyster revives the spirits that flagged in the Row. Watch the bow windows of some ancient club, and, while still holding that good wine needs no bush, confess that good wine gets it.

IV
WANDERERS

CHAPTER IV

WANDERERS

ALPHONSE DAUDET, when analysing Tartarin de Tarascon, found in him two Tartarins, Tartarin Quixote and Tartarin Sancho. Tartarin Quixote liked fighting, adventure, uncertainty, blood, knives, unscalable peaks, tornadoes at sea. Tartarin Sancho liked flannel vests, long drinks of lemonade on a hot day, chocolate in bed in the morning. No doubt, Tartarin Quixote and Tartarin Sancho live in many of us, and certainly I confess to desperate moods which, on the whole, I restrain, and to self-indulgent moods which, on the whole, I encourage; but when we consider men we know, it is curious how much more strongly Tartarin Sancho or Tartarin Quixote is developed in them. Tartarin Sancho leads the majority of mankind, that majority which is always looking for a good billet, for a pension, for a nice little wife, a cat, and a garden. Some, more ambitious, substitute for the nice little wife a woman of title, for the cat a hunter, for the garden an estate, but their desires, after all, are still those of Sancho, even though they are those of Sancho become Governor of Barataria. Naturally they adopt the wadded life. It is not a crime, and no doubt many of the Tartarin Quixotes, who number among them tight-rope dancers, mining magnates, card-sharpers, and cabinet ministers, often come to regret the bed quilt of a blameless life. Only the bed quilt is not for them.

Somehow, I don't know why, I cannot help feeling that Tartarin Sancho is less normal than Tartarin Quixote. He does such strange things; he enlists in a bank, grinds out his little span of life and dies; or he becomes a barrister, pleads cases he believes in, and also others; or Tartarin Sancho turns into a respectable stockbroker, that is to say, he never speculates, but induces other people to gamble; or he becomes a professional soldier, and passes the first half of his life hoping there will be a war; if there is none, then he passes the other half in the rather more decayed parts of Earl's Court. These are queer trades, for

they do not seem to satisfy anything that man needs if he is to feel complete. It is not enough that a man should, by the time he dies, have manufactured, let us say, large quantities of office furniture, have played golf, have gone to Eastbourne or Monte Carlo, have met the one girl whom he wrongly imagined to be the only girl in the world, ignoring the fact that there are thousands like her, have reproduced the species and left them behind to do likewise. 'Such is life,' says my old friend the housekeeper of Wellington Buildings, Bethnal Green; she is right, but somehow this explanation does not satisfy me, and I wonder whether all those respectable, clean-living people are not really degenerates, in so far as they have lost the desire for colour in life. It may be that Tartarin Quixote does not desire colour in life, and that he would gladly exchange the pebbly bed of romance for the eiderdown of the regular life; still, what a man does matters, as well as what a man desires. It is all very well praising the mute, inglorious Milton in the factory or the shop, but the Milton who manages to break the silence is also important in the scheme. The idea is greater than the fact, but to deny the fact would be to run Plato too far.

Therein lies the charm of the queer people, in whom London is rich, people who follow unexpected occupations, occupations that nobody would naturally think of following. One can understand how Mrs Smith comes to hear from one of her husband's friends that they want an apprentice in the printing shop; she sends little Tommy to the printing shop, and he becomes a printer. But how does little Paolo become an ice-cream man? There are lots of ice-cream men, and so we must believe that some impulse directed young Paolo towards ice-cream. How did it happen? Was it a vocation, this selling of ice-cream? Did he discover an ice-cream opening? I don't know; I once asked an ice-cream merchant why he sold ice-cream. He told me that he did it because his father did it. Then I asked him why his father sold ice-cream. He told me that his father sold ice-cream because his grandfather sold ice-cream. Then I saw that we might go on for a long time like this, and let him alone, for the ice-cream

merchant was growing suspicious. I am glad that I do not know whether his grandfather sold ice-cream because his great-grandfather sold ice-cream, for this leaves a little to my imagination, and I am able to imagine that in the misty cinquecento, some adventurous Florentine, some relative of Benvenuto Cellini, was impelled to forsake a hospitable guild to push about the European tracks the gay little carriage that to-day bears the Italian flag, diplomatically intertwined with the flag of the country in which the merchant happens to trade, the portrait of King Victor, and, on the other side, some touching scene such as ' Mother's Last Kiss.'

The ice-cream man sets out every day on adventure. He may have a beat, but I prefer to think that he follows in the wake of the sun, always where it is hottest, caring little whether the street be mean or opulent. I like to think of him as at the mercy of a cold snap that ruins him, while it makes the fortune of his fellow merchant, the hot-potato man. (What a beautiful poem Tennyson would have made of that . . . the golden wheel turning, and raising high, now the ice-cream, then the hot potato . . . and always above a noble voice bidding them hope and pray.) Of course, there are no hot-potato men now. I wonder what happened to them. Indeed, that is what oppresses the curious when he considers the wanderers: what becomes of them when they are no longer strong enough to ply their strange trades and to range the world? Are our workhouses full of crossing-sweepers who sweep no more? Perhaps it is not so tragic, after all, to have been a crossing-sweeper and to end in the workhouse; I cannot imagine a crossing-sweeper murmuring with Mr Kipling: ' Me that 'ave been what I've been! ' for he has never been more than what Mr Tim Healy would call a movable fixture. He has just sat and touched his cap, and been tipped, and has occasionally swept. But he must have meditated. No man can sit for ten hours a day in the same place without meditating; I say this without authority, for I have known only one crossing-sweeper who meditated to any effect; he was a pronounced optimist, and believed that the world was getting better and better, this because,

for forty years, he had been observing the quality of people's boots. As he put it, when he started in life some of them wore no boots; later on, they began to wear other people's cast-off boots; now they were getting on to buy their own boots, and what with that, and what with the skirts getting shorter and shorter, and the stocking getting thinner and thinner, by gum, he was blowed if he knew what was going to happen next.

No, crossing-sweepers are not wanderers. They are limpets. I should not have thought of them if they were not street folk, for it is a distinguishing trait of the wanderer that he is a street creature, something that appears from the stones in the early morning, and at night into the stones seems to vanish. The London wanderer may have a home, but only in the sense of the London sparrow. Can you imagine the flower-girl's home? If the flower-girl were indeed the sort of flower-girl of whom you see half a hundred portraits every year in the Royal Academy, a sort of pure and peach-blossom girl, she would have a home like Mélisande, very, very small and dainty (you know, the Charbonnel and Walker-Marcus Stone style), with chairs covered in flowered chintzes, and a white cat. At night she would lie in her little white bed, over the head of which would hang a text about the lilies of the field; her fair hair would ripple over the pillow; her rosy lips would open in a sweet smile as she dreamed of the dear little faded flowers which she had stood for the night in her tooth-glass. (Tooth-glass! Nasty realist touch; I shall never do this sort of thing properly.) Ah, if it were only like that! If she were not a big, fine woman of about forty, tied up in three thick shawls, which imperfectly conceal her tidal bodice; if only she did not so much love a quartern of gin. It would be much more romantic, but I should regret her if she were to turn into a picture post card, for she is such a jolly good, saucy sort, as a rule, and I like her thick hand terminated by five sausages, one of these sausages strangulated by a wedding ring, the thickness of which places one beyond all cynicism as to the permanence of the tie. You see her in many places, by the fountain at Piccadilly Circus, until all the nobs have bought a bunch of violets for

FLOWER GIRL

[See page 45

somebody, now that they have given up the habit of buying a flower for themselves; then you see her near restaurant entrances, cleverly shaming men into buying flowers for women who are already wearing some, and who do not know what to do with the offering because it is invariably very wet; later on, outside theatres near the queues; she is all enterprise, and during the war I even saw her trying to sell to an unpromising margarine queue.

She grows old at her trade; it is a healthy one, and she has no home. Some of her fellows are stranger and still more definably homeless. Thus the muffin-man, killed, perhaps, by the war. It is a long time since I heard his bell, and was thereby assured that Sunday was getting on nicely, and would be over by-and-by. There is the travelling accountant, a real wanderer, that one, who, every day and night, goes from little shop to little factory, continually confronted with new names, new deals, and, perhaps, new and complicated methods of dishonesty. There are the queerest and most incomprehensible of all, the guides. I do not know what turns a man into a guide, but if you stand awhile near Charing Cross, and make a noise like a Jugo-Slav, it is likely that a seedily, respectably dressed man, with a badly rolled umbrella, will offer to show you the town. Once it is clear that he does not want to exchange pocket-books with you to show his confidence, he may lead you to Henry V.'s chapel, to Westminster Abbey, to Carlyle's house, and so on, reciting as he goes, something like this: 'The painted 'all was originally planned by King John the same who signed that Magna Charta in the year 1215 but the plans being lost in the Wash the project did not come to take form before the year 1533 when King Henry VIII after his marriage with Anne Boleyn laid the foundations on the plans of Sir 'Erbert 'Opkins who was also the architect of the golden tower of Muswell 'Ill where Nell Gwynn . . .' and so on. That man is a gramophone; I once let him show me Saragossa, but he shall never show me anything more. For one thing, I believe he is respectable at heart, and there is no profit in his company. The only good guide is the amateur guide. I met one in Brussels once, a cab-driver, who stopped before the café where I was

having a drink; he so many times cried out to me, 'Hi, Englishman! you're a sportsman, come along!' that I fell a prey to his flattery. (Who told him that every Englishman wants to be thought a sportsman?) He knew his Brussels pretty well, but I will not tell you the rest of the story, for he also knew his Englishman pretty well.

There are many more of these strange people. A strange one was a woman who offered to give me a thousand guesses at her profession; I declined the proposal and found out that she was a pearl threader. Few of us know that the silken thread, on which collars of pearls are strung, wears out, and that, from time to time, pearls have to be re-strung. All women do not care to send their pearls to the jeweller, for the art of Tecla is profound. Nor do they care to re-thread them themselves, for the holes are so small that the work is infinitely wearisome. So my pearl-threader, who looked like the most respectable type of retired maid, spent her life in Mayfair and Belgravia, where she sat re-threading pearls while the owner read a novel. The pearl-threader smiled as she told this: 'One of them,' she said, 'read a newspaper upside down all the time while I was doing her pearls. And there is another, so unsuspicious; she turns her back on me and smokes a cigarette, and stares into the looking-glass, dreamy-like.'

But that is a high walk of wanderer. There are others more tragic. There used to be a terrible creature, the runner, who followed four-wheelers laden with luggage, and arrived at the end of his long run too blown to be red in the face, but lead white, his right hand gripped to his heart, his left hand spasmodically touching the greasy brim of his cap. I have seen no greater agony than the hungry desire in those filmy eyes, half-obscured by the wet, dust-laden eyelids. I used to stop the runners when I could; often they persisted, their open mouth close to the wheel; they could not see me wave them away, or they could not hear me call out, as if all the energy of their poor senses had passed into those eternally running legs. One of them seized my trunk as we arrived, before I could ransom myself, hating

my opulence, full of shame. It is fifteen years ago, but I remember him, a big body, but little flesh; I remember his eyes like glass, and the awful stagger of him as he bent under the weight of the trunk, as he tottered, and as I leaped to seize it when it fell. Then the door opened, and the hotel waiter came out with the air of black hostility which the house dog has for the street dog. The runner looked at us without anger, without misery, though he understood very well that the job was not for him; he was like a Greek peasant patiently encountering fate. But, as he turned away, clasping my shilling in his hand, and I saw the foot in the broken boot fumble for the step, a wave of self-hatred rose in me. I told myself: 'You have crucified him.'

They are not so tragic, all of them, unaccountable people, or even people who have adopted trades one thinks queer because one would not have adopted them oneself. Some are merely disgusting, such as the bus-conductor. I have met a civil bus-conductor; I have even met an optimistic one, but nowadays, especially, he stands exposed by comparison with the girl-conductor. Oh, it is natural enough that the girl should have been friendly, civil, clean, obliging, for to her the job was new, varied, faintly exciting, probably better paid than her previous work. But still, she made the man terrible. He seems to be nearly always a rather grimy, ill-shaven, misanthropic man; something of the watch-dog and of the bureaucrat has crept into his constitution; he cannot gently ask for fares; the demand must come with a snap and a snarl, pitched on a high note that shall reach the recesses of the omnibus and of the traveller's consciousness. When he yelps: 'Fares!' I feel for my ticket as if I were guilty; when he looks at me, his little, hard eye suggests that I am bilking the company, and then I hate him so that, if I can, I do bilk the company, and get off four hundred yards to the good, bursting with an unexpelled shout of 'Yah!' I hate him above all because, so often, he companions my journey with a snarly chorus, addressed sometimes to the wretched nearest occupant. One hears him run on: 'Some people can't learn where buses stop; seem to think it's the Lord Mayor's coach; pulling the string themselves, too;

might as well be no conductor.' Or it is something like this: 'Chucking their half-crowns about; taking about four hours finding 'em, too; come into the bus and expect to get change as if it was a blooming bank; gave her twenty-four ha'pennies though, that'll learn her.' Or, during a shower: 'Plenty room on top. Drop o' rain won't 'urt yer. When it's fine they all want to get on top.' And so on, a regular orgy of grace and charm. Growl, grouse, snap, snarl, grumble, yap, and long, dirty moustaches, filthy hands, and if it is not a grudging black hand to help a white sleeve on to the bus, it is a hand that has to restrain itself not to shove the white shoulder off. All that because the poor brute is not happy. I know I ought to be sympathetic, for it must be dreadful to travel all day from Camden Town to Brixton and back, to sell so small a variety of goods, never to feel steady ground under your feet when you look for change, to answer the same idiotic question seventy times a day, to tread on feet, to have your feet trodden on. The bus-conductor is a nasty man because he is an unhappy man, because he has no prospect in life, save that of growing older and, for all I know, retiring without a pension. Those monotonous occupations, such as the hellish one of lift-man, ought not to be human occupations, and they will not be such some day. Meanwhile, they rack by boredom people to whom has not been given the free expanse of the pedlar. What a brute Charon must have become by now!

Those people who range freely street and field are indeed of another kind; there is in them less civilisation and more civility. They are detached from their fellows; they lead lives of their own within the beating life of the world. Many of the newspaper-sellers are pleasant, ironic people, with a capacity for estimating character, with a quick interest in the news they retail. Citizens of the world, they are often so stimulated by their news that, as you buy, they must tell you the contents of the stop-press. It is a hard trade. Before the war they used to pay ninepence for twenty-seven halfpenny papers: fourpence-halfpenny profit for selling twenty-seven papers! Still, there is a nomadic satisfaction

in their movable beat. They are not locked up. They are in the midst of life, other people's life, but yet life.

To quite another class belong the beggars, not the pseudo-beggars who profess to sell laces or matches, or the blind, for these are inanimate beggars and nobody knows what goes on behind their faces, but the adventurous beggars, the old woman who follows you, shrilly asking for the price of a cup of tea, or the well-known teacher of French, who stops you in the street and asks you what chance he has of a professorship at King's College. Those adventurers are amusing because they are coloured, because, if you stop, they will tell you where they come from, the number and names of their children, the diseases from which they suffer, and, indeed, recite you the shameless novel of their lives.

Of the same kind, but more offensive, is the fern-seller who is nearly always (or was before the war) a particularly burly brute, carrying a couple of potted ferns under each arm. He haunts the quieter streets of the West End, and when a woman alone meets him late at night, she will do well to make for the nearest policeman, the proper method being to ask the fern-seller to carry the ferns home for her: a policeman will doubtless be encountered on the way. I remember a fern-seller, who accosted me once in Portman Square. It was about six o'clock in the evening; I told the man that I wanted no ferns; he followed me, rumbling abuse which I could hardly hear. As it happened, I was looking for lodgings, and stopped at a likely house in Portman Street. As I had been walking rather fast, I thought that I had got rid of him, but, seeing I was going into a house, he ran up behind me, and once more began his pressure. While I was ordering him off the door opened, and a fat little landlord, with a grubby little white beard and choleric little blue eyes in a puffy little pink face, stood staring in the doorway. 'If you don't go,' I said to the man, 'I'll give you in charge.' But the man went on whining and growling and, being very young, I was filled with awful confusion at this brawl on the step. This was increased by the nasty little landlord, who said: 'What do you want?'

'I want to see some rooms,' I replied, and to the fern-seller: 'Did you hear what I said?'

'I've got no rooms,' snapped the landlord, 'get out of it, both of you.'

'What the devil do you mean by both of you?' I said to the landlord, being thoroughly enraged. Then I became paralysed at having to quarrel on two different subjects simultaneously.

'Mean by it!' shouted the little landlord. 'What do *you* mean by creating a disturbance on my doorstep? Let rooms to the likes of you! You're drunk!'

At that moment the fern-seller was breathing on me, and I saw that the landlord's words were well-founded, though ill-directed. Before I could think of a reply, the little landlord slammed his door so as to make the whole of Portman Street shake. And I remained alone with the fern-seller, who still painstakingly and threateningly attempted to make me buy ferns. He was the sort of man who speaks from under his under lip. I was so ashamed that I did not say one word, but ran. Oh! how good and free Oxford Street felt.

I have not been much annoyed or interested by the more desperate wanderers one comes across. Only once did anything perilous come my way, and that I will call 'The Row in Homer Row.' It was many years ago. I had, one evening, made an acquaintanceship with the light fallibility that will, I hope, always characterise youth. It did not at once have results; some other business intervened, but I remember quite well that I returned at nine o'clock to a little block of flats, that were not exactly flats, but superior model dwellings. I remember the hard, stone stairs and the iron banisters, you will soon see why. As I left, later in the evening, I shut the door of the flat behind me, and stood for a second in the entire blackness of the landing. Then I felt a foot against my left ankle, and a hand grip my left arm. It was the darkness saved me, for it is not easy accurately to seize an arm in the dark, and the notorious 'pull-over' is not suited for cellar blackness. I remember that I did not think, that I did not have time to be afraid. I remember only the vast

unchaining of a self-protective instinct, that swung my right hand across to the left. I swear I did not will it. And I still have unforgettably in my knuckles the sensation of crash and give, in my ears the curious, fat sound, something like 'kroch,' that was made by some teeth giving way under the blow. And then there was an immensely long pause, during which I had time to think; it may have lasted a tenth of a second. There was a dull, muffled sound, that of a head striking the iron banisters. That is all, except that I remember the clatter of my feet on the stone stairs.

But to the man who wanders in London streets at night, and I am one of these, stranger things happen. One of those cases was 'The Poisoned Girl of Grosvenor Square.' It was about twelve o'clock at night. As I turned out of Brook Street into the Square, I saw on my right two people by the railings of an area. One was a woman dressed in black, kneeling down and holding on to the railings by one hand. The other was a man, who stood a few yards off, with statue-like immobility. I remember thinking: 'This is awkward. He has been knocking her about, and I suppose I shall have to say something, and if he attacks me in front no doubt she'll attack me from behind.' But still, there was nothing to do but to say something. So I went up to them, and suddenly realised that the two people had nothing to do with each other. She was kneeling in that frozen attitude, and he was looking on. The girl was young, very white, with masses of fair hair. She was neatly dressed in black, and looked like a parlourmaid. Her eyes were closed, and she seemed hardly to breathe. Two or three times I asked her what was the matter, but she did not reply. Then only did I look at the man, who was evidently of another class. A rather large, square man, the sort of man whom you know to be bald, though he has his hat on, with a moustache that was too thick, and cheeks that were too healthy, a phlegmatic, staring man.

'What's the matter with her?' I asked.

'I don't know,' said the man.

As it was clear that he was the sort of man who wouldn't

know, I turned to the girl and, taking her by the shoulder, tried to make her stand up. I was surprised to find her limp instead of stiff, and she fell back against my shoulder with a little groan.

'Let me alone,' she murmured.

'What's the matter?' I asked again. 'Are you in any trouble?'

'Let me alone,' she said again.

I felt irritated because she did not realise that I couldn't let her alone, that man's code compelled me to torture her, and that nothing in the world could allow me to let her alone.

'Let me help you,' I said, feeling that I behaved like a considerable idiot. 'What is it?'

She opened her eyes a little, and murmured: 'I've taken something.'

'Taken something?' I repeated, vaguely thinking of theft. 'What do you mean? Taken something.'

'Poison,' she said. Then again: 'Let me alone.'

I hear the shrillness of my voice as I cried out: 'Poison!'; then I found myself hurrying her along the pavement. 'What is it?' I said to her, as we went. 'Is it laudanum? You've got to walk, you know,' and to the man: 'Hurry up. Get a cab.' There was no cab to be seen. 'Come along!' I shouted. 'Run ahead and get a cab.' After a moment's hesitation he waddled away, not much faster than we. And now the girl was almost weeping, while I tortured her with questions, tried to make her run, this one idea of laudanum in my mind. At last she answered: 'Spirits of salt.'

It took us very long, I think, to get up North Audley Street, and I felt rent by her youth and her prettiness, for the fair hair was coming unbound on my shoulder. There was a tenderness in me as I lifted her at last into the cab. I remember saying to the man, 'You've been pretty slow about it. I hope you haven't killed her. What were you doing staring at her instead of doing something?'

Then he said: 'Oh, well, one doesn't want to be mixed up.'

There is no end to this story. I took her to the Middlesex,

THE HEART OF THE CITY

To face page 50

and they saved her by means of the stomach pump: to this day I cannot help wishing that her salvation might have had a more romantic name. But much more impressive is the man's remark. I should not wonder if most people go through life with a single end in view: not to be mixed up. And one might as well be dead as not be mixed up. I have been much more mixed up than I dare tell in this respectable volume. I stole a baby once.

That is the story of 'The Stolen Baby of Pimlico.' I was waiting for an omnibus one night at the Chippenham. A young, dark girl was also waiting for the omnibus, but as she was showing more signs of impatience than are usual, namely, stamping, I could not help being interested. At last, as she passed me and flung me a look of intense malevolence, which I felt was rather unfair, I could not help smiling and saying: 'I wonder whether there are any more buses.' (Now I come to think of it, I might have said something more soothing.) This had the unexpected result of arousing confidence. 'There's got to be another bus,' she said. 'I've got to fetch my sister's baby.'

'Oh!' I remarked.

We said no more for some time, and still no omnibus came. Then a taxi crawled up to us, and I said: 'Well, if there are no more buses we had better take this taxi.' The dark girl, who was young and very pretty, put on an expression of increased malevolence, but as I stopped the taxi, she said: 'Oh, all right then, but I give the cabman the address, and not you.' As we sat down, I gathered from this that my wanderer was no fledgling. But, after a few minutes, as she discovered that I made no attempt to kiss her, she became confidential. She had run away from an evil stepmother. She had £2 10s. She had just taken a furnished flat at £3 10s. a week. She was nineteen. She was going on the stage. Also, she wouldn't have gone away if it hadn't been for her father. (Rather mixed, this.) As we drew nearer to Pimlico I became more and more confused, for the baby was turning into her sister-in-law's baby, and I swear that he became a she. We stopped in a little black street in Pimlico, in front of an enormous Victorian house which was still blacker than the street.

'I must ring,' said the girl, and promptly took from her little bag a key. Therefore she did not ring, but disappeared into the house, the inside of which was blacker than the outside, leaving the door wide open. After I had waited for a moment she came out again: 'I say,' she said, 'I can't carry him down; he's too heavy.'

'Oh,' I thought, 'now I'm in for it. But they can't have laid much of a trap for a young man picked up outside the Chippenham.' So, true to my principles, I went in. The house stank of solitude. It was the sort of house that does not even creak. I felt my way up to the first floor, and in a back room where there was very little besides a bed and a couple of chairs, I found asleep a pretty boy aged about five. 'Pick him up,' murmured the girl, 'and don't make a noise, I don't want to wake the woman so late.' Obediently I picked him up, and carried him down into the taxi. Just as the girl was about to follow me in, she said: 'Now I'd better pay the woman. Lend me two shillings.' In a few moments she came back, and some time later made me pull up the taxi at the corner of a side street, off Elgin Avenue.

Only later did all these confusions, this mixture of sexes and relationships, the silence in the silent house, lead me to theories. Little by little they crystallised into this: I seem to have stolen a baby I don't know, belonging to somebody I don't know, and taken it I don't know where, in the charge of I don't know whom. It preyed on me rather. I even worked up an alibi. Now I suppose it does not matter, as the child may be a householder.

There are many other stories I should like to tell, that of 'The Watchmaker and the Four Pounds of Black-Lead,' though, really, the adventure of 'The Two Girls from County Cork and the Lost Camisole,' is much more remarkable, but these and others must appear in another volume. There are many of these people, and one never discovers them before ten o'clock or so. They live in the streets, where they have their loves and their tragedies, and mainly in those places where there is not too much

light. They like the darkness because the light of human understanding is not good for their peculiar affairs. We do not think enough of the influence of light. When we stand on Primrose Hill and, as Karl Baedeker would put it, behold before us the rich expanse of a great and sleeping city, we do not individualise the lights enough. When we look down upon Piccadilly Circus flaring from every veranda, and, like the laburnum, dropping wells of fire, when in these days we stand at the corner of Tottenham Court Road and watch the electric signs: 'Player's Navy Mixture,' 'Meux's London Original Stout,' 'Y.M.C.A.,' and 'Tube,' when we walk in all that brightness, we do not realise that this is the spirit of our city, the rather crude, commercial, and friendly spirit of London. Nor, in other cities at night, say in Birmingham, where through the dirty glass falls dirty yellow light, do we perceive in man unambitiousness. For mankind must have light. Light alone opens the windows on life, and makes night Arabian.

Only one creature likes the dark, and that is a wanderer, the cat. Have you watched cats at night? If you try in the street to stroke cats when the mood of night is on them, when they crouch under a bush, rolled up into tight balls, their sharp heads sunk into the woolly folds of their shoulders, when some are shadows in the shadow, spotted with two points of fire, they will not shrink from you, nor approach you, but so remain in static life. Or they will swiftly pass you, at that queer, soft trot, making towards a secret direction with entire intentness. Or, one upon the steps of a house, the other on a balustrade, they will face each other with swishing tails, and so remain in immense motion within the same spot, an infinity of provocation in every shiver of their sleek flanks; you, human, shall not know whether they are minded to love or war. If you interfere, you break the spell of their communication, but there is no room for you in their compact. You are the spectre of the commander, and they flee. But you shall feel the hostility they have left behind them; it flows from the immense cruelty of their cold eyes, that are lovely as emerald and topaz, that can harbour no love, but only

voluptuousness, calm, deep eyes that calculate and fix only upon that which can serve them, eyes that glimpse only things they fear and things they desire, not things for which they may suffer. You shall stay awhile in that hostile ambiance, while they have fled into the night, to adventures more secret and profound than any that may be yours, even though you, too, be one of Diana's foresters, a gentleman of the shade, a minion of the moon.

V
SOUPS AND STEWS

CHAPTER V

SOUPS AND STEWS

In another chapter of this book the change that has come over London feeding has already been indicated. The times when respectability edicted that one should eat only within the family circle, when all that could be obtained abroad was a stodgy meal of bread and cheese at a coffee-house, or the lightest refreshment at Vauxhall or Cremorne, are long gone by; to-day, almost as many meals are consumed at restaurants as under homely roofs. It was a long battle the restaurants waged under the early banners of Hatchett's or the Café Royal and, strange to say, the Grand Hotel. Yes, once upon a time the Grand Hotel, that ancestor, was the latest thing; in the eighties it was 'the thing' to lunch or stay at the Grand Hotel. But, in those days, 'the thing' was rather a scandalous thing, and if one lunched or dined away from home one felt dissipated; one had to choose one's company when taking a meal thus, for the worst was easily thought of one in 1880, while to-day, the best is hoped for. (There is, perhaps, no great difference between the two attitudes.)

In those days the home was a British institution; it figured in the solemn list which numbered suet pudding, the royal family, bustles, Tennyson, the evangelical attitude, and chenille decoration of mantelpieces. The home had its rights; indeed, it had all rights; it was the place where you ought to want to be, and far from which you would naturally feel remorse; it was the thing you had to 'keep together,' the thing you had to 'make,' to 'save'; your self-abnegation should have told you that you had no rights except to add the pillar of your person to those of the porch. It has gone, this Victorian rectitude; it has gone the way of Dundreary whiskers and of weepers round the hat; I suspect that the restaurant habit, as it is called, has turned some of the sods for its grave. There is something relaxing in a restaurant, at least to a people such as ours, afflicted with a considerable sense of private licence and of public dignity. Restaurant dining

outrages in us a sort of modesty, and, like most Puritans, we rather enjoy having our modesty outraged; it is the revenge of the flesh, and it pleases us godly men to discover in ourselves a streak of the devil. We feel this rather more in the foreign restaurants than in the British; in the British eating-houses, where there is no menu, but only a bill of fare, where understandable things, such as mock-turtle soup, boiled mutton with caper sauce, and roly-poly are offered us, we know too well where we are; we eat, instead of giving way to greediness; by avoiding that temptation we avoid one of the cardinal sins, and more's the pity. In foreign restaurants, however, where neither the name of the dish nor the form it assumes is understandable, we can develop a sense of sin; we can do this because our feet are set on foreign ways, all of which lead to Babylon. Foreign waiters address us, and there is no virtue in their eyes; they look like assassins, and it is thrilling to think that they may be assassins, or nihilists, or grand-dukes. Foreigners dine at the tables; their women are too smart to be good; the yellow-backed novels they bring in must surely be undesirable; they are poorly clad, which proves that they lead sinful lives; they are richly dressed, which points to evil courses. They are foreign. Is not the Drury Lane villain foreign ?

From this sense of sin arose in the beginning the popularity of the Soho restaurants. I do not know when they began to be popular. Some, such as the Restaurant d'Italie, the Monico, the Villa Villa, are old stagers, but when I first came to town their customers were mostly men; if couples came they generally included a man who did not care to take his womenkind to such places, but did not mind taking other people's womenkind. (Thus it worked out just the same in the end.) The growth of London, which compelled men to live farther and farther out, favoured the restaurants, for distant dormitories drive men to proximate refectories. The Soho restaurant grew in numbers, together with the Cabins, the Lyons's, the J.P.'s, and others, but at the same time, because they provided pleasant fare at low prices, they gained advertisement from the men who first frequented

SOHO MARKET

them. Thus the women heard of them, and they liked them immensely, for the Soho restaurant provides exactly the sort of meal that many women want: next to nothing, pleasantly served. So, in the last dozen years, they have prospered enormously; the early ones, such as Brice's, Le Diner Français, Au Petit Riche, found many rivals such as the Moulin d'Or, the Mont Blanc, Chantecler, Maxim's, the Rendezvous, etc. Their career has been curiously uniform. Nearly all have been started by a chef, a waiter who had saved up a small working capital or married well. Being foreigners, the proprietors liked good cooking, and in the beginning every Soho restaurant offered a good meal. To-day there are still a few where the proprietor circulates among the tables, asking you whether you are satisfied, and naïvely begs congratulation, but that state of mind is rare. So long as the customers were mainly foreign, the standard was kept up: small, important, subtle things were done, such as steaming vegetables instead of boiling them, such as putting in salt while the meat cooked. But the Englishmen who came to lunch, having advertised their wonderful find, grew very proud of it, began to bring their friends, their sisters, and, nowadays, even their aunts. They came in increasing numbers, and the proprietors discovered three things: that there were in London more Londoners than foreigners; that the Londoners were willing to pay more than the foreigners; that they either didn't know what they ate, or that they didn't care. As very few of the proprietors were in business as artists; as, moreover, they grew discouraged when they went round the tables and asked people whether they had enjoyed the stuffed mushrooms and were asked: 'Were they stuffed?' they ceased to take pains. They found out what the English customer wanted: paper flowers on the tables, Japanese fans, and dishes with incomprehensible names. So, one after the other, they began to cater for a purely English clientèle; a good many have discovered that the English customers expect made-up meats instead of, say, roast beef, and are willing to take those meats on trust; so the wise proprietor, in many cases, makes up his menu from the dishes left over from the night before at the

Carlton or the Ritz. After all, he gives them what they want: a dissipated atmosphere. Not long ago, I watched four school mistresses in a state of considerable dissipation. They sat in the little restaurant, laughing rather more shrilly than they would have at Simpson's, as if excited by the rather excessive effect of prettiness, the mauve walls, the blue and yellow curtains, the pretty fringed shades. Oh, how one understood Sally Bishop! How the mellow spirit of Mr Temple Thurston brooded with folded wings over the little place! The school mistresses listened hungrily for French, which was being spoken by the attendants, and they kept a wary eye upon their fellow lunchers: sober couples drinking claret; young men and women, the latter unpowdered, the former oppressed by sartorial self-righteousness. There was nothing against the lunch; it was a nice, ordinary little lunch; the sort of well-cooked little lunch that could be turned out by the gross, out of a machine, all the year round, every little lunch alike, for ever and ever. But my school mistresses were tasting dissipation while avoiding vice.

In true cooking one does not avoid vice. One courts vice. One says: 'Eating is a sensuality, and we shall satisfy our senses as much as we can. We shall sing hymns to it; people have sung hymns to drinking, why not to eating? We are not ashamed of "feasting" our eyes and our ears; why not our palates?' Some people understand this. Mr Anatole France sums it up well when analysing a Castelnaudary stew:—

'The Castelnaudary stew contains the preserved thighs of geese, whitened beans, bacon, and a little sausage. To be good it must have been cooked lengthily upon a gentle fire. Clemence's stew has been cooking for twenty years. She puts into the stew sometimes goose or bacon, sometimes sausage or beans, but it is always the same stew. The foundation endures; this ancient and precious foundation gives the stew the quality that in the picture of old Venetian masters you find in the women's amber flesh.'

If you are a proper person you will call this disgusting; you will feel that this is an indecent subject, and that an author who

dares to head his chapter 'Soups and Stews' ought in another world to be chained for a thousand years to the ghost of Colonel Newnham Davis. That is a legacy of the past; not more than twenty years ago it was indeed indecent to discuss food, and if a vulgarian did so, the only thing the lady of the house could reply was: 'Oh, really!' The war has altered that, and I am inclined to hope that people who endlessly discussed the difference between butter and margarine, the advantages to be found in neck of mutton, will maintain these not ignoble preoccupations. I believe they will, for they were moving that way; they had already left far behind the Victorian lady with a wasp waist who 'daintily pecked at her dinner like a little bird.' They may one day adopt Brillat-Savarin's dictum: 'Let me cook your ministers' dishes, and they will give you good laws.'

But, leaving aside Soho, which is, after all, only the culinary frontier, we find that the restaurant has spread over the whole of London, carrying everywhere its gospel of satisfaction. This gospel takes various forms, for restaurants fall into different classes according to their locality and their prices. There are the pompous, like the Carlton, the Savoy, the Popular Café; there are the distinguished, such as Claridge's, Jules's, Dieudonné's; there are the fanciful, such as Pagani, Verrey's, old Gambrinus, Bellomo's, Gustave, the Savoyard, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Greek; there is the slab-of-meat class, such as Gatti's, Simpson's, to say nothing of the Shepherd's Bush Restaurant, and the Tulse Hill Hotel; above all there is the restaurant of the Joseph Lyons civilisation, the Strand Palace Hotel, the Regent Palace, the Strand Corner House.

They all deserve their little word, and it is difficult to say of each of them just what should be said, because they have so much in common, yet are so far apart, like brothers and sisters. There is a flavour of Joseph Lyons at the Savoy, while Gatti has Reggiori for a little relative. Yet, when one comes to know them well, they are all so different. No one, for instance, could mistake the Carlton for the Savoy; both have a broad spaciousness born of their size, of the comparative expensiveness of their meats;

both are lofty and white and clean; their glass is pretty good, and their plate so-so. But while the Carlton maintains a certain air of having selected from among the not very select, the Savoy shows little sign of having tried that much. To lunch at the Savoy makes one feel not so much that one is among the rich as among the well-to-do on short leave. The Savoy is sober; its luxury is quieter than that of the Joseph Lyons restaurant; in a way, with its top lights, its flowers, it recalls the Joseph Lyons civilisation; the flowers are real, but not much more so; the band is more discreet, but it plays the same tunes. Its population, too, is different; at the Savoy, you do not see the young clerk, but you do see what some of the young clerks will become if they are lucky; many foreigners in a state of gormandise and bejewelment; rather dowdy people, too, the well-off dowdy, whose sideboards must be taken to pieces before they can be got into country cottages. The business element is strong. Somehow, one tells a business man fairly easily; he wears good clothes that nearly fit him; his hair is well cut, his cheek is well shaved, but a consciousness of the barber's art hangs about his head; his elegance is not a natural product, it is one of the goods which he produces; he misses ' the line ' which some sediment of aristocracy or musical-comedy upstart achieves better than will ever the business man's solidities. There is too much meat upon his cheeks; you feel that he is a little too rich, just as his eyes are a little too bright; he is like a very new knife that has not yet learned to cut.

Others, too, Americans, who are happier in those big hotels than any of the English, because hotel-life is, in many of them, an acquired characteristic. They are interesting, those Savoy Americans, abundant women, exquisite girls made of beautifully tinted steel-plate, those men with the square shoulders, square chins, square heads, cubic cheeks; you know, without being told, that they are connected with the cinema trade, or that they are producing a play by Mr Montague Glass or Mr Bayard Veiller, or that they are selling many motor-cars, or something like that. (The American who comes to Europe for the purpose of exporting

THE SAVOY

art to Pittsburg is not found at the Savoy; he goes to Chelsea and Fitzroy Square.) And yet it is not a disagreeable place; its breadth, the airy width of plate-glass that looks out upon the Thames, the cheapness and the adequacy of its food, all these are part of the new restaurant of the new civilisation, which has replaced the little taverns in the little corners of the town. It is no use being sentimental over the little restaurant, or, indeed, over anything little: there are too many of us for anything little to be much more than a survival. If restaurants did not feed us a thousand at a time, they would never manage to feed us all.

One thinks of that in the small restaurants that have survived, such as Verrey's. To many people it seems a queer thing to lunch at Verrey's; it seems rather out of date, and, indeed, when one approaches that frontage, painted a sort of faded 1850 blue and provided with coloured glass, one has a sense of antiquity. Inside antiquity is still more striking, for the big, square room under the skylight manages at the same time to be drab in colour and Moorish Gothic in architecture. It still has the many mirrors of the 'fifties, an air of being comfortably off enough to afford to be dowdy. Rakish and dowdy! Can anything better translate the amusements of two generations ago? To-day, Verrey's gives you a fair lunch, and at its café tables, which are somehow more substantial than the café tables of Paris, you understand what England thought the Continent must be like in the days of the Grand Tour.

There are other places, fanciful as Verrey's. There is Bellomo's, in Jermyn Street, a modest, pleasant little place, a long, narrow back room filled with agreeable young couples. Bellomo's is rather like a young-old man, with its panelled wainscoting, its wallpaper of faded gold, and its moulded, early Victorian frieze. There is something solid about its dumb waiters; Bellomo's is somehow benevolent.

But then Verrey's and Bellomo's are within limited flights of fancy. The curious gastronome will, in London, easily find queerer places and foods. At Pagani's he can come to understand that risotto may well be eaten in Valhalla; at Gambrinus's, the Regent

Street one, of course, he could, before the war, when it was German, find unexpected delight in liver-sausage sandwiches, with perfectly sour gherkins, and, heaven of heavens, really cold beer. In those days it was decorated with antlers, enormous fanciful jugs, out of which you enormously drank the frozen gold of that beer. I think it has become Belgian since the war; I am not quite sure, for I went there only once after the transfer.

But the truly curious go not to foreigners like Pagani or Gambrinus, or even to Gustave, where the foods are truly French, or to the Savoyard, where they are French and eatable under the eye of strange pictures; the truly curious go not to the foreigner, but to the professional foreigner, to restaurants such as the Greek, the Chinese, or the Japanese. Of these the Chinese is the most attractive. I mean the Cathay, next door to the Monico, not the Chinese restaurants in Limehouse, where nothing is eatable, and nothing is tragic, and nothing is coloured, let Mr Thomas Burke say what he likes. A lunch at the Chinese restaurant is really an adventure, for nearly all the dishes are made of the same things, and yet they all taste different. There is an admirable dish, hang-yang-kai-ting, made of fried chicken with almonds and bamboo shoots. That is a simple one, and the curious will find more profit in a dish the name of which I have forgotten, which contains fried sliced pork, celery, beans, sprouts, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and green chutney. Eat that, and it is a very large, overflowing, savoury portion; flavour it well with chop-suey (which you can call liquid salt if you are a foreign devil). Eat it immediately after chicken liver soup, and if you do not forget before swallowing the bamboo shoots to chew, and chew, and chew, then a true mellowness will be known to you. Also, do not forget the great bowl of boiled rice, pure, white rice, perfectly dried, not sticky rice *à la A.B.C.*, but rice where every grain remembers that it has a personality. Don't ask for chop-sticks: the best people in China do not use chopsticks; they use forks. (There used to be a Chinese restaurant where they provided chopsticks for the English; it was great fun watching them pour their food down their sleeves with that conscious air of duty that

seems to overwhelm the Englishman experiencing pleasure.) And don't forget dessert, ginger in syrup, fire in the midst of sweetness, like a red-haired girl; and ly-chee, large, sweet, white nuts in an opalescent syrup, extraordinarily good.

But, in a way, all those places, the very rich and the very odd, are running on their own ticket, and do not express the times in which we live. Our modern times are the Strand Corner House. I should not wonder if many of my readers had never been into the Strand Corner House; that is, if they are incurious of life. If they repent their acceptance of things as they are, they will find an unexpectedly large building decorated with heavily flowered stucco mouldings, with plate-glass, with stained glass, with panels of crimson satin. They will find light, co-operative luxury; superposed tiers, bearing crowds of people lunching on the top of one another's heads, and at the bottom of a deep well, a band that can be heard above the clatter of twelve hundred pairs of jaws. A thousand people at a time really eat all together at the Strand Corner House, and, in a way, no wonder. The place is quite clean, not offensive in its appurtenances, and can supply three courses for less than two shillings; the music is the ordinary dance or sentimental music, the sort that makes you feel friendly or affectionate as required. The public of the Strand Corner House is, therefore, the world. Its variety is much greater than that of any other place. One might think that this public would consist exclusively of flappers and their escorts, and, indeed, the flapper is prevalent, though she comes in threes and fours quite as much as more ostentatiously with a 'boy.' Also the suburbs, middle-aged couples, when the wife has been shopping in St Paul's Churchyard and has strayed down the Strand; unexpectedly you see people with an air of modish vanity, dashing people who smoke cigarettes and drink claret, damning both the expense and the consequences. Though very few of the frequenters could be mistaken for members of the classes, none are members of the masses; they seem to be in a state of social suspension; they are, especially the girls, of a rather crystalline type. I mean that you realise their good looks at once instead

of by degrees. If you look about you, you will not fail to find half a dozen faces that can give you the knock . . . only, if you look round the other way, you will probably see another half a dozen faces that can give you exactly the same knock, and when one is an old Londoner and has been getting the knock all one's life, well, one unfortunately comes to stand it rather well.

These great crowds of young people with a little money in their pocket and much zest in their hearts tend to fall into uniform types. The men nearly all buy their collars at the Regent Street branches of city hosiers; the girls seem to skim the lighter froth of the big West End stores, except that Marshall's knows them not. This produces a uniform quality: they have to overtake the fashions, and so become a little *outrées*.

Women, more readily than men, respond to the stratifications of restaurants, because they are more adaptable. Their very clothes show it; women are like cats, they have no bones, and easily suit themselves to bell-mouthed skirt or hobble. The female form is infinitely squashable and extensible; any fashion can transform it, and if a woman has the wit to shun the becoming, she can always be in the fashion if she dares. If she fails, it is because she does not dare to underline her deficiency. If I were a woman and extraordinarily tall, I should dress myself in vertical stripes; if I were very short and very stout, I should insert the hoops of barrels under my skirt; I should be hideous, but I should be It, for the essence of true fashion is extremism. I said fashion, not elegance; that is quite another story, but then, to be elegant you must be born as the greyhound, and if you strive to elegance you are more likely to resemble the mouse. Fashion is much easier.

Not only in her clothes, but in herself, does the metropolitan girl define her city. She is always the creature of the day, who heavily overlays the creature of all time. In soups and stews she has little part, for a woman is a poor partner at the table. She eats and drinks, as a rule, without much science or much intentness; she eats too little, she bolts; she does not realise that she is doing something important and artistic. Oh, it is not that she

SHOPPING

is lifted high above material desires, for, indeed, certain articles of food, such as chocolates, certain drinks, such as liqueurs, make her accept the society of the dullest and the most dreary, but such trifles are merely the preludes and the coronals of the true soup and the true stew. Still, she is the decoration and the charm of the table; when Mr Lauzerte said that where there are no women there is no true elegance, he was speaking the truth. In matters of food they care very little what it is and very much what it looks. Also, because few of them neglect an advantage and prove the old adage that what woman most desires is mastery over man, they never ignore what they look upon as a gross means of seduction. It was a woman, I think, who told another to ' feed the brute.' What an illusion! If you have to deal with a brute, indeed, you can keep him quiet by feeding him, just as you mollify Cerberus with a sop, but to keep a man quiet . . . how unnecessary in the early days of marriage! and how disastrous after! It is unconsciously, I think, that women strive to please the palate of men, that is they are unconscious of the effects of such a course. Unless they are very unhappy they do not want to soothe the sullen creature; they wish to produce in him a light and airy grace, a not very promising ambition. For some men, who are in possession of all their senses, will feel true gratitude, which is akin to love, to the one who knows how so to flatter them. One of them said to me not long ago: ' It makes the day easier to feel that I shall go back to-night to a perfectly cooked meal, and a perfectly dressed wife.' I am not quite sure whether he said that, or whether it was ' a perfectly dressed wife, and a perfectly cooked meal,' but anyhow, it does not matter, for in that man's mind the two delights had grown mixed. That is what every woman knows, and perhaps she is wise as well as humble in hoping to mingle with the *potage velouté* some of the old philtres of love.

VI
IN SEARCH OF VICE

CHAPTER VI

IN SEARCH OF VICE

When I first came to London I was twenty years old; I came from Paris, and, being twenty, felt sure that there remained no sensations for me to experience, no realms of passion to explore. I felt that I had lived—well, lived; that I came from Babylon city, and was now entering a Puritanic world, a place of dignities and parliaments, of clergymen with white bibs, of ladies with prominent teeth and elastic-sided boots who said 'shocking'; I also felt that I was entering the country of *le sport*, *le flirt*; I had also been told that the English were a strange people, adepts in every depravity, of which the secret drinking of methylated spirits was a minor example. I admired them thoroughly, as I admired Westminster Abbey. Briefly, a land of virtue. This state of mind was fairly well kept up for the first year, because it rained nearly all the time, and there is nothing like a rainy summer to raise the moral tone of the streets. I was interested by the life I saw round me, bored by the life I led on thirty-eight shillings a week; I could afford little in the way of theatres; whisky made me sick; so did Irish stew and suet pudding; I did not see as much of my fellows as I wanted, because, in those days, I often had to choose between a clean shirt in the evening, and a cut from the joint at lunch. Also, my landlady washed the collie in the bath, which annoyed me.

It is not surprising, then, that I did not at once enter London's 'gilded haunts of vice.' It took me a little time to discover them, and, to be truthful, I am still looking for them. Indeed, I can say that I have employed a considerable portion of the last eighteen years in search of vice, and it may be that I must blame a Parisian education for my disappointment. I thought I had found vice the first time I saw a couple publicly embrace, opposite Marble Arch, never having seen anything so indecent in a Continental city; but this was an illusion, just like another illusion when, for the first time, I heard a speaker in the Park state his true opinion

of the Royal Family: I thought this was the beginning of the revolution, and could not understand why the police looked so bored. I do now, for I suppose that meetings have been going on for several generations. But when it came to vice, when I explained to my new and fast English friends that I was looking for vice, when they took me to the old Empire Promenade, when they bade me be shocked at the condition of Regent Street, between Vigo Street and Piccadilly Circus, when they took me to Earl's Court to ogle and to drink milk-coffee, when they drew my attention to the chorus girls performing what they called orgies in the punts near Maidenhead, a certain melancholy crept over me. English vice was overrated. Indeed, to this day, I am sure that there is very little vice in England, that the Londoner, particularly, is a flighty creature, who kills virtue with his mouth, who tells unpleasant stories about the deeds of other people, and paints the town red with the assistance of his fancy socks. They are cowards, really, and most of them, when they slip at all, seem to slip ignobly into the rare satisfaction of a purely animal instinct; also, to do this, they need drink. Nero would not have understood them at all.

Since those days much time has passed, and now and then, here and there, I have come a little closer to those strange and secret depravities of which, according to the Continent, London holds the monopoly. The newspapers are helpful; for they have occasional fits of virtue and begin to expose something, thus, at last, giving it an advertisement; or the police intervene and shut up a restaurant, thus focusing all eyes upon its proprietor and making him so famous that when he opens another restaurant next door he is assured of custom. And so I have known dreadful places, manicure shops where hands were held longer than filing demands, tea shops where the depraved waitresses call you ' old dear,' and demonstrate that in a chair when there is room for one there is room for two. It is perfectly appalling. I have been to the old Continental and to the old Globe Restaurant to spend considerable sums on not very satisfactory meals, to see a number of ladies manifest a little more clearly than is the custom the liberalism of their mind. I don't know why it strikes the

Puritan faction as so terrible that the women whom they call lost should congregate in a particular place; it cannot be because thus they can be found, for the Puritans must know that there is no street in central London, no tube, no omnibus, which does not hold as much temptation and as much opportunity as a small room in a quiet restaurant. I suppose it is the openness of the thing shocks them, the fact that they cannot cover it up and, therefore, pretend it is not there. But if that is vice, if that is 'the smirch on our fair escutcheon,' then, indeed, must English prudery be easily offended. It must be a sensitive prudery, for it cried out against night-clubs, against the Cave of the Golden Calf, where a few people did drink too much, against the excessive dancing at poor Ciro's, which for a time fell among Y.M.C.A.'s.

Also, during the war, a great fuss was raised in the newspapers over the flappers in the Strand. I do not think anybody would have bothered much about the flappers if, at that time, we had not had among us a number of Anzacs who, as everybody knows, are the gentlest and most guileless of men. These unfortunate young soldiers, finding themselves lonely in a town such as ours, where no man needs go lonely along a street if he has a little determination, lacking all the home comforts which are implied in the possession of aunts, made their acquaintances where they could. The flappers in the Strand who, to my knowledge, have always been in the Strand, particularly on Saturday afternoon and on Saturday night, when they descend upon Villiers Street and the bandstand, coming from Aldgate and alighting at Charing Cross, naturally welcomed them. Now, in the old days the flappers attached themselves to any young man they met; sometimes he was a soldier in a red coat, sometimes just a civilian, and nobody bothered, because in those days it was not evident that anything unusual existed in the association. Common sense revealed to all of us that these friendships had been formed round the bandstand, but nobody was compelled to know that they did not arise out of engagements of five years' standing. On the other hand, the Anzacs, with their beautiful bodies, their bronzed faces and their squash hats, were noticeable;

a Puritan, after having, in the course of Saturday afternoon, seen several hundred Anzacs accompanied by pretty girls, was compelled to realise that there could not be so many Anzacs united by engagements of five years' standing, to the flappers in the Strand. The Puritan hates realising, because when he realises he has to do something energetic, write to a paper, or form a committee, or something. He does not mind writing to a paper or forming a committee, but the whole thing upsets him; he cannot cover it up, and he runs about with wild eyes, terrified because the thing which is generally covered up has got loose.

It was that gave rise to the trouble, and the Puritans, determined that the flappers should flap no more, had to manufacture a theoretical Anzac, a young man from Melbourne (but born in the Bush, where no woman had ever been before), a young man extraordinarily pure in spirit, but liable to fall into temptation even if he had to cross the road to do so, a young man imbued by his past education with a profound reverence for womankind, whose feelings of reverence were daily being outraged by shameless exhibitions into which he was reluctantly drawn. It's queer; this flapper question occupied the Press for months; now and then the controversy died down, and then a Bishop or a special article writer brought it up again; agents-general were called upon to proclaim that our soldiers feared no foe in shining armour because their heart was pure, while, in the same column, presidents of watch committees gloomily acknowledged that something seemed to have happened to the purity of those hearts. But all agreed that that purity must at once be restored, that the Anzacs, which includes the Canadians, the South Africans, and other moral weaklings, must be protected. To this day we are protecting men of thirty against girls of fifteen: I never heard anybody talk of protecting the flappers, for it was assumed that, by the time they were fifteen, they had sunk too deep in iniquity to deserve better protection than four walls in Holloway. And no one seems to have asked himself whether these young men, cut away from old habits, from their friends and their work, did not desperately want feminine companionship; the members of watch

committees did not ask Colonials to stay with them for the week-end; for a long time they did not even provide them with sufficient sleeping places, but seemed to expect them to make merry all night in the ribald waiting-rooms of Waterloo. Briefly, their virtue was to be its own reward, and certainly we could not take from Nietzsche the aphorism that man is for war, woman for the recreation of the warrior. Above all, we could not let them alone.

Owing to this, my moral sense being aroused by an article in a Sunday paper, I devoted a Saturday to a search for vice. Of course, I began in the Strand, where I was told vice reigns. I saw a great number of soldiers, doubtless viciously employed, but conducting their debauches with singular restraint and dignity. Outside the Corner House stood a number of boudoir ladies from the Government offices, who were deplorably waiting for omnibuses; many of them may have been viciously employed, but as their company was mostly confined to their own sex, they were not sliding very fast down the butter-slide of perdition; mostly, they were eating chocolates, and the fact that chocolates then cost four shillings a pound may be sufficient evidence of undesirable conduct, but this seems to me hardly enough to hang even a girl on. I proceeded up the Strand where the East End was slowly beginning to arrive, mostly in twos and threes. Often, indeed, I met the regrettable flapper; certainly she was powdered and lip-salved, and I do not know that this is exceptional, but right up to Temple Bar not a single flapper made an effort to draw me from the straight path. (It is all very well saying that I may not be the sort of person whom the flapper would want to draw from the straight path, but surely vice has no pride, and stoops to all men.) The most vicious thing I saw was two soldiers and two girls walking rudely arm in arm.

I did my best. Indeed, I think I became a regular *agent provocateur*, but I did not seem able to provoke anybody. So, desperately, I turned back and crossed the river towards Waterloo Road. The reputation of this gray and green commercial track was made by the street arab in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, who declared that if he did in Morocco the things he did in

Waterloo Road he would be hanged. But nothing was happening in Waterloo Road; many people were drinking in many public-houses; I entered a few public-houses, and though I tried as hard as the two houses of convocation put together, I found nothing. I will not weary you with details; it is enough to say that, still guided by my Sunday newspaper, I proceeded on my footsore search. By evening, I was lurking round Victoria, watching from the corner of my eyes for the harpies who drug veteran members of the Band of Hope, and after I had loafed about for a while, no doubt I must have conveyed a harpy-like suggestion; I was seen in a picture palace, peering into the dimness of the curtained boxes, which was easy, as they were not dim. That night I was seen in many places, searching the blackness of railway arches, furtively peering down the staircases of tubes, hoping to discover the worst; I appeared in the deserted City; the back streets of Theobald's Road, the confidences of a hall porter in Gerrard Street (expensive and uneventful), a long inspection of the first floor fronts of Vauxhall Bridge Road, seen from the top of a tram, all these grew familiar to me; and still nothing. As time went on, my legs grew more and more woolly; my mind so obsessed and incoherent, that I realised time would soon fit me for membership of the National Vigilance Society. I even entered the Leicester Lounge, where there was hardly anybody, as it was not Boat Race night; then I wondered whether a visit to North Bank, St John's Wood . . . and awoke from my trance, remembering that this would be thirty years late. There is no vice in London; at least, there is nothing deliberate and artistic, just as there is very little in Paris or Vienna that would justify a Welsh elder in taking so long a journey. It is a pity that so fair a bubble should be pricked.

This does not mean that London is a magnified Exeter Hall. There are, in this town, about half a million bachelors, and that is enough to lower the moral status of any city. There are also rather more married men, which does not mend matters. Observe the bias of my mind: I have forgotten to tell you the number, frequently quoted by indignant letter writers to the Press, of

women who hold forth temptation. For it may be true that supply assists demand, but it is much more certain that demand makes supply. During the war, for instance, there was great agitation in the Upper House of Convocation, where the Bishop of London revealed that in Cayeux and Havre undesirable houses were frequented by British troops. Canon Burroughs went on to ask for purity patrols, while the Bishop of Oxford presented a resolution designed to protect our troops from molestation in London. This is all very well, and deserves all sympathy, but the Bishop of London unfortunately read out a protest addressed to the Mayor of the French town by its inhabitants, and this protest referred to ' crowds of English soldiers waiting outside the houses.' Does one, then, wait for temptation ? Does not temptation steal upon one as a thief in the night, or as a raging lion, seeking whom it may devour ? It is a picturesque idea this, of crowds of innocent victims impatiently waiting for an opportunity to degrade their eternal spirit.

Temptation is nonsense. I have spoken to many men about temptation; they are seldom tempted, and this for very good reasons: men do not fall, they dive. The women who ' prey on them,' fulfil a function which will be necessary so long as society is as vilely constituted as it is, so long as life is hard and insecure, so long as social relations are false, so long as marriage is expensive and difficult of dissolution, and, especially, so long as the hearts of men are brutish and the hearts of women soft. The class which for centuries has been hunted, has for centuries been maintained by the hunter, just as the fox is bred and protected for the pleasure of the chase. Those women do not seem to me to lead as easy lives as the men who profit by their weakness; they look rather less well-fed, less well-clad; they wear gold of a lesser carat; when they die their names do not appear in the newspapers under the final advertisement: ' To-day's wills.' Truly, the wages of sin are low. Should we not conclude that if bread is so dear, and flesh and blood cheap, there is no great inducement for the sale of flesh and blood, except the cost of bread? Perhaps it is the easiest way, but only for those to whom all ways would be easy.

There is no remedy for what the social campaigners call the condition of our streets, except an alteration in the mind of the men who walk in them; Christianity cannot help, for Christianity attempts to solve this problem by purging sin, instead of realising misfortune. Thus too many Christians justify Tacitus: 'After the burning of Rome, suspicion fell on the Emperor. In order to allay them, the Emperor embarked on a series of persecutions; among those he persecuted was a sect that called themselves Christians, who had incurred the animosity of the populace owing to their sullen hatred of mankind.'

Tacitus was wrong, but then he was judging the Christians of his day as agitators. The streets will alter when the houses along the streets alter, when mankind has found love in the mind, when it is no longer content with the love of the body. The majority of men seem to approach life as pigs do the trough. Visit a West End restaurant, and you will be sure. In that trough are not only curds and whey, and truffles, and other suitable dainties; but excessive clothes and jewellery, honours, false social values, irrelevant powers; so long as the Gadarene crowd nuzzle and fight about that trough, so long will many of those, who are not Gadarene in the spirit, be infected with envy and desire, so long will they be driven to shrillness and self-advertisement, so long drawn by popularity and repelled by fame. Meanwhile, it naturally follows that what many call vice should endure, for vice is the satisfaction that dulls the flesh when the spirit aches. Happy men have no vices; it is only the unhappy, the hungry, fly to them. For my part, if I had to make laws for a new society, I would make few. I should say rather that we will build our new society so that all may be assured security and justice, but no more. If we were to establish justice, we should automatically do away with the curse of the world, which is wealth. It might be a pity. It may be that Anatole France is right when he says: 'The devil dead, good-bye sin. Maybe beauty, this ally of the devil, will vanish with him. Maybe that we shall not again see the flowers that intoxicate, and the eyes that slay.' Still, one would like to see it tried.

THE CHELSEA ARTS BALL

VII
THE POOR

CHAPTER VII

THE POOR

Not much more than a dozen years ago, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman startled England by stating that thirteen million of our people stood, at all times, on the edge of starvation. He took as a basis the study of the condition of the poor, made by Mr Charles Booth in a great number of volumes, containing a great number of columns of figures, and was alluding in general to the large class that existed on a family income of twenty-three shillings a week. There was something terrible about those figures, so terrible that even the press was shocked. But there was something uninspired and inhuman about Mr Booth's columns of figures; it is all very well telling us that so many thousands of people live five in a room, and so many thousands six in a room, and so on, but it does not mean anything. The ordinary man finds it almost as difficult to imagine that kind of life as to visualise a million; he can see six people in a room, but his mind does not bring up the idea of those six people in material attitudes, sleeping, eating, courting, making merry; figures create no microcosm. I suspect that to understand the poor, a little, you need to know very well the places where the poor live. The house is a fairly clear indication of the inhabitant; it is the house he chose, or the house to which he submitted. Then who is this poor man? this poor man round whom so many essays have been written? by the Fabian Society, judicial; by the Charity Organisation Society, severe; by Mr John Galsworthy, understanding and tender? The poor man is of the same genus as the rich man, but of a different species. (I mean the born poor man as opposed to the born rich man.) The rich man is no better than the poor man; the poor man is no better than the rich man; they are different creatures, made such by different conditions, just as a Spaniard and a Lancastrian are made different by their various lives. Only, and there's the political rub, Englishmen have not to administer the affairs of Spaniards, while they do have to administer the affairs of their

own poor; thus it is important that they should not blunder, because the poor are not good at improving conditions; their attitude is to grin and bear, and then, one day, to cease to bear.

To understand them at all one must take an imaginative leap; if you find this difficult, Mr John Galsworthy has taken it admirably in *The Freelands*. Listen to his description of a labourer's life:—

'He gets up summer and winter . . . out of a bed that he cannot afford time or money to keep too clean or warm, in a small room that probably has not a large enough window; into clothes stiff with work, and boots stiff with clay; makes something hot for himself, very likely brings some of it to his wife and children; goes out, attending to his digestion crudely and without comfort; works with his hands and feet from half-past six or seven in the morning till past five at night, except that twice he stops for an hour or so and eats simple things that he would not altogether have chosen to eat, if he could have had his will. He goes home to a tea that has been got ready for him, and has a clean-up without assistance, smokes a pipe of shag, reads a newspaper perhaps two days old, and goes out again to work for his own good, in his vegetable patch, or to sit on a wooden bench in an atmosphere of beer and "baccy." And so, dead tired, but not from directing other people, he drowses himself to early lying again in his doubtful bed.'

One should read, as a contrast, Mr Galsworthy's description of the rich man he calls Malloring:—

'Your Malloring is called with a cup of tea, at, say, seven o'clock, out of a nice, clean, warm bed; he gets into a bath that has been got ready for him; into clothes and boots that have been brushed for him; and goes down to a room where there's a fire burning already if it's a cold day, writes a few letters, perhaps, before eating a breakfast of exactly what he likes, nicely prepared for him, and reading the newspaper that best comforts his soul; when he has eaten and read, he lights his cigar or his pipe, and attends to his digestion in the most sanitary and comfortable fashion; then in his study he sits down to the steady direction of

other people, either by interview or by writing letters, or what not. In this way, between directing people and eating what he likes, he passes the whole day, except that for two or three hours, sometimes indeed seven or eight hours, he attends to his physique by riding, motoring, playing a game, or indulging in a sport that he has chosen for himself. And, at the end of all that, he probably has another bath that has been made ready for him, puts on clean clothes that have been put out for him, goes down to a good dinner that has been cooked for him, smokes, reads, learns, and inwardly digests, or else plays cards, billiards, and acts host until he is sleepy, and so to bed, in a clean, warm bed, in a clean, fresh room.'

I challenge you to say that this is exaggerated. If you like, say you don't care; but don't say it isn't true. And I will not preach at you, but suggest, to such as detect in me sentimentality, that if we belong to a refined and gifted class into whose hands the world has been given, if, indeed, we are refined and gifted people, a condition such as that of the poor man should offend our æsthetic sense. I have known a rather larger number of poor men than is usual in my class; I have not known them very well, because the worst of the difference between the rich and the poor is that the poor cannot trust the rich; they know them too well. The poor know that the rich conduct against them the class-war, and so they are defensive, inclined either to say the thing that will procure a tip, or a post as office-boy for little Tommy, or they will turn savagely on you to show you they are as good as you, and tell you that though margarine is good enough for you, their inborn good taste makes it impossible for them to consume anything but the best butter. One does not get together, any more than that Spaniard and that Lancastrian would get together, after five years of Ollendorff. Still, if one passionately wants to understand, one sometimes, for a moment, perceives the shadow of a hint of what another creature is. I remember perceiving it, for the first time, in the midst of an alien family in Widegate Street, just off Petticoat Lane; I had been sent by the firm who employed me to make searching inquiries and to dispense small bounties.

My aliens were, I think, German Jews, who called themselves Russian refugees because it sounded more appealing; they were not a pleasant crowd; the man was a great, big, heavy, fat fellow, with greasy, black hair, a rather surly brigand; there was a woman, too, lying in a corner, dirtier than the man, presumably because she had been lying there for some time; there were four little children, exceedingly fat and well kept, the usual mystery of Jewish poverty; there was an extraordinarily old woman who sat next to the woman on the floor, and from the beginning to the end of the interview said not a word and moved not a feature. But the horror of it came from the woman on the floor, who also said not a word: there was no furniture in the room, not a table, not a chair, not even a bed; the woman lay on a few crumpled newspapers . . . and had, the night before, given birth to a child, who lay naked between her indescribably filthy bodice and her breast. They were there, all together, in the midst of life, left and abandoned, hungrily desirous of the moment when the great industrial machine of London would be ready to consume them. Impostors, perhaps, but if so, hard is the way of imposture and slender the wages thereof.

I remember thinking, after that, as I went along Petticoat Lane, that is become Middlesex Street, how much the district resembled the people. There is no Petticoat Lane now; Middlesex Street holds nothing picturesque or national; even its open-air market on Sunday morning can be paralleled by any Saturday afternoon scene in the little streets off Edgware Road, or in Walker's Court, Soho. It is a street mainly of warehouses; Widegate Street and Sandys Row exhibit the oddity of narrow crookedness and no more. Petticoat Lane, where the shops are paltry, and the folk divide into too fat and too lean, is not even a mean street. Its one charm is the prevalent, handsome young Jewess, aged about fourteen, with high tasselled boots, and plenty of silk stocking, containing plenty of leg. She is a fine girl; she haunts you all along Whitechapel Road, and so to Mile End, with her rude air of wealth and wealth-consciousness. I don't know how she does it; with very little money, some crude colour and

some light furs, she suggests opulence. There is something matronly about her, too; she looks so marriageable . . . and when one looks into the humid softness of her brown eyes, one finds a limitless rectitude of morals, which may arise from a limitless power to resist temptation.

Her thick mouth is tight closed; her stays are tight; her mind is tight. She is fair and square, and will give her husband value for his money, but somehow one feels it a pity that all she will give him is value.

Those girls are part of a certain reckless gaiety that pervades Whitechapel. I like Whitechapel Road; the streets that run off it are indeed tragic with dirt and desolation, but the road itself, which is the pleasure-house of the inhabitants, is full of vitality. At all times it is thickly peopled, mostly with foreign Jews of all types, many of them scrubby little men with beards, who gesticulate in groups at street corners, and argue with their co-religionists. Some are in a state of offensive prosperity. Those Jewish crowds are more alive than the average London crowd; their eyes shine more, as if they were more capable of conceiving desire. They are at their most intense before the many open-air stalls, where you may buy boots and clothing, flowers, toys, and books, and music, and furniture, and every food you know, and some you do not; and teasers for ladies, and surprises for gents, and penny boxes of tricks that will make you popular at a social evening, and collections of jokes of ancient lineage. It is a wonderful show; it is, in many ways, more wonderful than Williamson's Bonanza in the Brixton Road, because it is cheaper, because a penny goes farther, and thus the penn'orth is more hotly desired. All that points to another side of the poor, the side Mr Galsworthy never sees: their joys.

It is true that the joyous side of poverty is much less evident than the unhappy side; this because the pleasures of the poor are either localised within their own homes (instead of outcropping in restaurants), or because they are confined every year to a limited number of delirious days. Also, the places in which they live are mostly so abominable that it is difficult for men of our sort to

understand that delight may dwell in a slum a little more easily, and a little longer than love in a cottage.

The slums are so evident to our eyes; they are everywhere. For instance, there is an unexpected little slum in the middle of Mayfair, round Shepherd Market and Shepherd Street. I believe the whole place is insanitary and should be pulled down (I have no love for the picturesque). It is surprising to think that the inhabitants of Mayfair must now and then go through the little, cramped market with the small, dirty houses, yet fail to discover that here, between Curzon Street and Piccadilly, stands a knot of public-houses at one of which, perhaps, Sam Weller was asked to take part in a swarry of boiled mutton; the hypothetical investigator from Grosvenor Square would be surprised to find out that here one can buy a shirt for 3s. 6d., sweets by the ounce, underclothes for 2s. 11d., and that for 2d. a hungry man can purchase a meat pie. It is like that all over London, in Belgravia, in Marylebone, just as in St Giles's. They have not quite slain St Giles's, the street-improvers, and there still is charm in Seven Dials, where once seven little public-houses stood at seven little corners, and each public-house had a dial. You told the time by tossing up or averaging. And now there is but one dial left, and it has lost its hands. (Hush, my soul! Do not let the spirit of Mr E. V. Lucas invade thee.)

There is more truth in the frank slums over the river. I once enjoyed the services of a supernumerary postman, who frequently came to my house to make experiments on the garden, to put up shelves, to interfere with the gas, or to drown kittens. In the end he went too far, for he attempted to cure the ball-cock of some obscure disease, and it responded to his treatment by flooding the kitchen three feet deep. But before that tragic day (you should have seen my cat swim), I visited him in Rotherhithe, because, among his many supernumerary trades, he numbered that of vine grower. Against the back of his house in West Lane he had, indeed, managed to grow a splendid, muscular-looking vine, which produced great quantities of grapes; these grapes, when eaten, reproduced what is probably the flavour of vitriol, but he

SHEPHERD'S MARKET

To face page 92

was very proud of them, and ate them, and he kept his vine in condition by occasionally watering its roots with a bucket of bullock's blood. He received this free, because he kept the slaughterer's books in his spare time. But all this is by the way, and there are many respectable old gentlemen who do all these things and are thought none the worse of; as everybody knows, lunacy in the poor is originality in the rich. What was interesting about the supernumerary's home was the breadth of West Lane, that is really a dingy square of bare earth planted with trees whose every sooty leaf whispers: 'Oh! had I the wings of a dove!' It is a square of crumbling Georgian frontages not devoid of a certain splendour. That discovery is one of the keys to the condition of the poor. You find this not only in Rotherhithe, but in Clapham, in Brixton, in the New Kent Road; here and there, behind the board of a photographer, where are exposed pictures of young men with all their hair brushed off their foreheads, and of young girls with all their hair brushed into their eyes, you see a beautiful old house with a porch of the Adams type. Many of these streets, such as Old Kent Road, such as Tooley Street, have become wholly commercial, have turned into long lines of gray warehouses and decaying side streets, haunted by many children; some, like Jamaica Road, and most of Bermondsey, have entirely fallen into the hands of the grayest commerce, but here and there you are bound to find a still splendid Georgian house, looking rather like a distressed Irish lady, who does her best to keep her transformation combed, and to maintain the traditions of the Ballymullins of County Mayo. These houses are in the hands of the poor, which means that, originally intended for prosperous people with several servants, they have been cut up into tenements; this also means that the stairs have not been mended since the days of William IV.; that Queen Victoria came to the throne, and married and mourned, that Disraeli passed reform bills while no bathrooms were put in; that the tap went on running in the backyard, where Georgian wealth used to fill the jugs; it means that the old house has lost most of its glass, and is running with mice and stinking with beetles; that the drains have been left by the

local to a higher authority. Part of the tragedy of the poor is that few houses have been built for them, and that they have to adapt themselves to houses discarded by the rich, which are not meant for them, which are not usable by them. The rooms are so large that the poor cannot afford them unless they overcrowd them; or they have tiny windows because they were limited by the old window tax. There is only one thing to do for them, as is the case with most institutions: blow them up.

Will the superman be bred by the L.C.C. ? I do not know, but I am sure that the superman will not be bred in any numbers in the middle of the stench of the past. Evil and old are almost synonyms, and I confess that I like better the vulgarity of the suburban street, with its concrete that pretends to be stone, and its plaster beams that pretend to be wood, its wooden pillars that pretend to be marble. I like it better, with its bay windows, so built that no article of furniture will fit it, with its awful ingle nooks, its sham gables and its sham dormer windows, than the awful old Georgian houses near Lamb's Conduit Street, where, crowded together under a ceiling still flecked with gold, on which naked cherubs sprawl, a dozen Russian furriers sit and scratch. For the hideous modern house can at least be clean; it is small; it is washable; a through draught can be arranged; a very little it opens the window on life.

In the sense of housing we have never housed our poor; hardly anywhere, up to 1900 or so, have we done anything but run up rude brick boxes as shelters, or adapt the dwellings of the rich. Hence, I believe, a stricken, scrofulous generation. Yes, I know there is a charm about all this black filth, as if, indeed, flowers did sprout from dunghills. It is the charm of contrast, it is singularity. You feel it in every poor region. You feel it at the Elephant and Castle, for instance, though why the Elephant should alone be famous, while at the two opposite corners sit the Rockingham and Alfred's Head, equally great public-houses, I do not know; you feel it in the rowdiness of London Road, and in a sort of ' none-of-your-lip ' air that hangs over Newington

Causeway. You feel it still more in Deptford; indeed, Deptford is a pitiful place, all gray stone and gray slate, but the smell of the sea hangs about it, and as it lies along the docks, often above these slate roofs, above the timber stacks of strange wood, you see the tangled masts and cranes cut out against the sky, patterns evidently designed by Nevinson. I remember once seeing on the shoulder of an old woman who kept a stationer's shop, a gorgeous parrot. It had a yellow and blue body, scarlet feathers in its tail, a bill of ebony, and eyes like molten gold. It sat on her shoulder, thinking of things old as the willow pattern. The parrot looked out upon Deptford High Street, through the flaming topaz of its eyes at the young men who passed now and then, sun-burnt starvelings of the merchant service, in blue jerseys; the sailors rolled and the parrot thought, and in the heat the East breathed from the logs of mahogany and sandalwood. But under all that, under all that theatrical charm was buried the same old thing, the bad old house made to fit the bad new time.

Yet, the poor are not as unhappy as they look. They do not, in the accepted sense, live a life of pleasure, but to say that they have no pleasures, or can have none because they are poor, is a mistake. The poor have cheap pleasures, pleasures which many of us do not care for, and they take no part in what we choose to call pleasures. If I were compelled to say something sweeping, I should say that the rich have less pleasures than the poor; they are free from more pains, but that is not the same thing. The pleasures of the poor reside much more than do ours in animal comforts; whereas the rich take a good dinner and its wines as a matter of course, the poor make a feast of a joint or a gallon of beer. Things such as these, food, drink, warmth, second-class travelling, arm-chairs, extra blankets, translate themselves, not into the mere satisfaction of needs, but into recognisable pleasures. It is so in the whole field of their amusements, the cinema, the music-hall, the football and cricket fields, where many watch matches, and a few play them; it is so in regard to bank holidays, to journeys to Southend or Margate, to bathing, to visiting the Chamber of Horrors, to being photographed. All these things

matter more to the poor than they do to the rich, and you will realise that this is true, if you recall that you have never met an underpaid clerk or a working girl who did not passionately look forward to holidays. On the other hand, you are all familiar with the state of mind of a well-to-do family, who solemnly discuss one May evening, 'Where shall we go in August?' When the poor discuss where they shall go to in August, and most of them mean on August Bank Holiday, they do not come together in the spirit of profound misery and grim hostility that characterises the respectable classes. They do not go away because they must go away in August, nor must they go away in August because everybody goes away in August: it costs them something to go away. The holiday is a treat, and is not a part of the household budget estimated for in every income. I need not stress this, but we all know that when estimates are prepared one must put in rent, rates, taxes, doctor, dentist, chemist . . . *holidays*. That is not pleasure. But it is pleasure when Alf tells Ethel that he has had a rise, and that they can this year rise to Cromer instead of Ramsgate. The difference is still more remarkable if we recall the 'thank-God-that's-over' attitude of the rich when, at last, their holiday is done, and the beneficent train pants into Paddington or Victoria. I have known many poor young men and women, and never met one who had not enjoyed a perfect holiday. I have met some who had passed seven days in a mackintosh, and even then had enjoyed a perfect holiday.

The poor have pleasures, because they draw more than we can from pleasures; they anticipate more, because they are less spoilt by the experience of pleasures, and have not yet found out that these have mutable faces. To make their good fortune more complete, they are even capable of anticipating pleasure without being disappointed when they attain it. Their pleasures are keen, because they are rare. They are keen, because they obtain very little pleasure without paying for it, and as they have little money they must scheme, plan, save; so pleasure becomes a thing to strive for, a true reward; they have to climb the fig tree to secure the figs; they are not cursed with the ownership of the

fig tree, cannot lie under its boughs until a ripe fig drops into their mouth.

We must not forget, too, that poverty has psychological reactions. Mr Bernard Shaw says that poverty is a disgusting disease, and, on the whole, he is right, but the sufferer has marvellous moments of recovery. In those moments the poor man does what the rich man, by long education, has been taught not to do: he lets himself go. He can hold arms with half a dozen companions and proceed uproariously along a pier, singing abominably an excellent music-hall tune, to the inefficient accompaniment of a concertina or mouth-organ; he can reel out of public-houses in a state of complete indifference to public opinion, instead of being secreted by the club waiter and paternally controlled by a taxi-driver; indeed, the poor man can derive much vanity from his condition, and rise in the esteem of his fellows next day, because he took part in such a spree. (In this country, if you can't be great, be drunk.) Above all, he can make love in public. He can, unashamedly, sit upon a bench in the park, complicatedly intertwined with his beloved, sometimes with two beloveds; nobody minds, and the little god of love will, for a moment, blind the policeman's bull's eye. He needs no Sussex down, nor footmen, nor thermos flasks, to make a picnic; with the *Daily Mirror* beneath the bough, a flask of ginger beer, and her beside him singing, 'Who were you with Last Night?' Battersea Park is Paradise enow.

Their social functions, too, are more social, and less functional. They do not, in our sense, entertain, that is to say they do not, at given intervals, go through their address book and say: 'We can't ask Lady So-and-So, because she has refused our last two invitations, and I suppose we must ask the Fitz-Thompsons. Or do you think we could get out of it?' No, they don't entertain; they prefer to be entertained, and so, on strictly scheduled occasions, namely, Christmas, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and engagements, *and on no others*, the whole family and a few very old friends are asked to a spread. And it *is* a spread. It is not compulsory jellies from Gunter's, or game pie from the Café Royal, or, still

worse, a dinner no better than every day's dinner, but merely a little longer; it is a real spread comprising three times the food that is normally eaten, choice food, such as tinned salmon, lobster, trifle with real brandy, stuffed loin of pork, likely to be remembered. If there is wine it is port wine, the real article. The real article and not the rotten routine. So the people they bring together are not the frigid crowd we call acquaintances, whom most of us ask because they have asked us, or because they threaten to do so, people whom we do not know very well and whom we don't want to know very well, people, therefore, on whom our display cannot make a great impression. The poor ask the people they know well, people who know their exact income. Thus they attain a great human pleasure: ostentation. The life of the poor is harsh, but their joys are keen. I used to know a woman who called them the poor poor. What a fool she was!

VIII
STONES

CHAPTER VIII

STONES

A CRITICAL foreigner, whose impressions of London I collected, (a thing one does to foreigners because that at least is common ground), gave words to the usual complaint of the Continental: London was a mean-looking city; its bricks were dirty; it used so little stone; lacked we stone? And the buildings were low. And some stuck out beyond the common frontage, while some set back. And so on, the whole served with the usual sauce made up mainly of respect for our practical spirit and our commercial success, the things we are not proud of because, indeed, they are ours.

Almost every foreigner has that impression of London, and he mistakes the spirit of our city so much that, to restore him, one has to show him typical American architecture such as Selfridge's, Kingsway, or older buildings of greater majesty, such as the Quadrant or the terraces round Regent's Park. Failing stone, we exhibit stucco, and the intelligent foreigner discerns no irony in the epigram on Nash:—

> 'Augustus, at Rome, was for building renowned,
> And of marble he left what of brick he had found;
> But is not our Nash, too, a very great master?
> He finds us all brick and he leaves us all plaster.'

Now stucco is an unfairly scorned material; it produces a pleasantly smooth surface, which weathers to creamy-olive, and, indeed, its only crime is that it conceals brick. Brick and tile are two of our most delightful materials; people do wrong to sneer at them just because poor cottages are so built. Red brick, when not too large, such as the delightful little Tudor brick, is smiling and domestic. The progress of building has, in this case, proved a retrogress for art. Nowadays, the big red bricks are so angular, so perfectly cemented that most blocks of flats approximate to

workhouses, while the yellow brick now current should be reserved for public buildings of special distinction, such as national memorials and academies of painting. But the little red brick that you could hold in your hand, the irregular lines of which bespoke a temperament, which fitted tenderly into patchy cement, as an almond of alabaster into the green velvet of its sheath, was quite another kind of stone. Still, we must take our stones as we find them, and I do not agree with the intelligent foreigner who thinks London a mean city. Many of us find the fine Continental cities, such as new Paris, new Barcelona, and new Frankfurt, as painful to live in as might be the Agricultural Hall. The houses are too high, their flanks too white, their alignment dull as a righteous life. When one considers towns like New York, one wonders how the inhabitant finds his way home. By scent, I suppose, for little can his eyes help him among those vast buildings, all alike.

In London, few streets and not many squares are alike. The detestable institution of the leasehold has had this good result, that few ground landlords in central London have built the houses they own. They have merely imposed upon the leaseholder the obligation to build a good house worth so much. As a result, the leaseholder has built what he fancied, and, therefore, London is not the result of the schemes of some horrid central office, but of the oddities and taste of thousands of men. That is why our sky-line is so broken, why, in Berkeley Square, we find two charming little, narrow houses close to a tall block of flats; that is why, in Oxford Street, tottering little shops, built under William IV., hug the Tube Station and its monster hotel. Variety is the salt of London life.

Where London has, to a certain extent, abandoned variety, and that to good purpose, is in the squares. London, more than any in the world, is a city of squares; a feudal remnant has there set most of the important houses, while those of the vassals were placed in the side streets, and those of the churls in the mews. The squares imply social classifications, and though many of them, such as Golden Square, Soho Square, Regent Square, have

THE TUBE, 9.30 A.M.

to face page 101

fallen into the hands of the poor or of commerce, they all began by being centres of polite society. To this day there is something in a square that no other thoroughfare has; a sort of measured enclosedness, a finished privacy. The garden in the middle that none enter save lovers and cats, a garden sometimes sooty, sometimes kept trim by a gardener born old, is cut off from the rough movement of the city. Those who have been interested enough to penetrate into the green part of Cavendish Square or Craven Hill Gardens, will know that there one is as truly lost as in any lane of West Anglia. Those green spots are almost untrodden, and, to all visitors, are virginal. The impression of privacy extends also to the houses; though these may differ they do not vastly do so. The contrasts between them are those which appear among the members of a family. All are, to a certain extent, traditional, and it is mainly in the squares that you find remnants of Georgian London.

Most of Georgian London has fallen into the hands of the tenement maker, because the people of the Georgian period built in districts now populous, such as Clapham, Highbury, Soho, Chalk Farm, because the leases were long and the houses good enough to make it unbusinesslike to pull them down. Still, some Georgian London, and especially some London of William IV., has preserved its old, flat face, sober and dignified, yet has been modernised, internally, by anachronistic organs such as the bathroom, the telephone, electric light. Those houses are delightful, for the adventure of the present has purged them of the sins of the past. Such houses as the one now tenanted by Messrs Thornton Smith, in Soho Square, the small houses with the Adams doorways that make up the Adelphi, the slim exquisiteness of Westminster in Barton Street or North Street, all these, by their very form, suggest that inside all is order and courtesy. Those houses were built when land was cheap, when we did not need to pile Smith upon Jones and call the result Cornucopia Court, or what not; in those days they did not need to store coal in the pantry, and, for historic reasons, they did not combine the bathroom with the kitchens. Still, these are only survivals, and though the late

William Willett did what he could near Avenue Road to restore the Georges under an Edward, the Georgian house is dead. It is too large; it leaves aside the servant problem; its rooms are too square, difficult to light, difficult to furnish in a period when furniture is small and tortured in design. It is almost as dead as the Elizabethan house, which is only a curiosity.

People still talk of Cloth Fair, but if you go to Smithfield you will find no Cloth Fair now, only a dirty little back street, not at all the scenery which Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree would have thought suitable for the entry of Bolingbroke into London. If you are wise, you will at once step back farther into the past and enter St Bartholomew's, where arches and pillars, broad and solid as those of hell, will make you understand the Mosaic quality of the Christian faith. In St Bartholomew's, that is black and dispassionate, dwells no gentle Redeemer, but the spirit of the Lord of Hosts.

True, there is Crosby Hall, though it is hard to shake off the connection between Crosby Hall and chops, for I knew it best in the days when, there, one ate chops (and sirloin, yes, sirloin). In those days, in the City, Crosby Hall was really an Elizabethan place, a mullioned old house, with sunken beams. For most of the day it held people who ate a great deal, drank a great deal, and bellowed, and played billiards, and flirted with the waitresses, and made bets, and told undesirable stories. Yes, it was real Shakespeare, all the time. But one day they pulled down Crosby Hall and re-erected it in Chelsea, near the end of Oakley Street; the last time I went in they were holding an exhibition of arts and crafts, which proved that leather might be compelled to assume many forms it didn't like. I never saw it again. Then there is St Ethelburga, the little wooden church in Bishopsgate, which takes, I believe, a special interest in seamen. A pleasant little church, for there is something very human and pre-Fire in its having let off its frontage to an optician. (I wonder whether the optician and the incumbent both labour under the motto of Usebius.)

But if Georgian London has left so little, and Elizabethan

London hardly anything, it is not so of the Victorian period, which still hangs over most of the city like the shadow of a great tree which will not let the flowers grow. Nearly all the houses in central London are Victorian; most are early Victorian, because the building rush in the 'eighties and 'nineties affected mainly the suburbs, where a ribald æstheticism combined with the discovery of the quaint by Charles Dickens. Now the Victorian period was neither picturesque nor quaint; it looked upon that sort of thing as indecent. It liked a plain house for a plain man, and the Victorian man got his house. In another fifty years or so, when time has done with the houses of the 'sixties, on their tombstone shall be inscribed: 'Eight steps and a brass knocker, such are the wages of virtue.' Some think that too much evil is spoken of the Victorian period, and that much that was solid, sound, truly English came to fruition in those days. For my part, I think that the Victorian period was nothing but a bad dream, that the English are essentially the people who drank sack, and danced round the maypole, just as now they drink beer and go to the cinema. The English are a pleasure-loving people, an emotional, perhaps a hysterical people; they are gay, improvident, thriftless, adventurous, reckless people; there is little to pick between them and the Neapolitans. Yes, there has been a lot of respectability and talk of carriage folk, and heavy sideboards, and being shocked, and all that sort of thing; but I submit that English history extends farther back than 1830, that there were happy days before the English grew oppressed with their new respectability, which arose slowly out of the sudden growth of wealth among numbers of ill-educated people. Before the 'thirties there were only two kinds of people: those who did what they were told, and those who did what they liked. The factory had begun to take shape in 1770; towards 1830 occurred the rise, all over the Midlands and North, of small workshops that became mills. This turned some members of the working class into capitalists. As the workshops grew, the working class population grew round them and formed towns. To serve the needs of these towns shops arose; these became prosperous, and produced

another fairly rich class, the shopkeeping class. From the 'sixties onwards, the workshops, warehouses, and shops grew so much that those who, once upon a time, were scriveners, became managers and agents. This produced a third class of ill-educated people endowed with some money.

The result was soon felt: we had created the middle class, and as, in those days, the middle class was still conscious of the upper class, realised itself as lowly bred, it concluded that the only way of living up to its new money was to be more moral and especially more refined than either the upper class or the lower class. That is the origin of the red damask curtains, of the English Sunday (which once upon a time was debauched and delicious), of wax fruit, tall hats, black silk, jet, and such like horrors.

But is that the end? No. Round about 1890, the middle class having made still more money, having split itself up into upper middle class and lower middle class, having sent its sons to the public schools and universities, its daughters to Brussels or Dresden, began swiftly *to slough off the old virtues which it no longer needed.* The daughters went to dances under slender chaperonage; some of them became Fabians; red paper was scraped off and replaced by brown; Jacobean furniture came in; respectable people began to dine at hotels and, what was much more fatal, to lunch at restaurants. Bridge came in . . . cigarettes crept in. I do not say the middle class is dead, but when you are tempted to think that the Victorian period represented, in English history, anything but an accident, anything but the formulation of a class, then consider most of your young acquaintances, and ask yourself, honestly, whether those very people, fifty years ago, would not have gone to funerals with weepers tied round their hats. To-day, there is a continuous impulse in the middle class to grow smart, fast, intellectual, all that. Call this progress or call it decay, never mind; I submit that it exhibits Victorian respectability as merely a stage in the development of English people, and that we are tending towards a time when the jolly 1780's will live again with something hectic and abandoned thrown in. The English people are a light people, a gay people, and the famous

period 1830-1880 was, after all, a short period in the eight hundred years odd which separate us from the Conqueror. It was a period of reconstruction, and the English emerged from it as new English, not very different from the old English. We have digested our money; of course, England was sleepy while she did that; those who believe that that sleep was natural to her suffer from illusion. Now she has begun to spend the resultant energy. Bustles, daguerreotypes, Sunday rest, and whiskers, Pecksniff will find all that in another region.

Pecksniff will also, at least I hope so, if he is to be happy, find the Victorian house. It was not a bad house inside, in spite of its vast, incoherent basement, the ell at the back of the drawing-room, and the shameful servants' bedrooms; it was a roomy house, but there was too much in it for the cockroach and the mouse. Most of Bayswater, Paddington, Kensington, and Marylebone, are Victorian; all depend upon slave labour. Few of those houses can be managed properly on less than three servants; some are still run by one servant assisted by the young ladies, who do the dusting, but the importance of the point lies in this: with one servant they are dirtily run; with two servants they are barely run. They are full of corners, corridors, cupboards; they collect dust, and eat up light. In days when flesh and blood was cheap, when you could easily get young girls to wear the skin off their knees on the steps, the edifice stood up pretty well. But those days are gone; the servant problem is partly due to the Victorian house, which became almost too much to bear when the servants developed enough to understand that there were things they need not bear. What will replace it, we do not yet know. It is too early to talk of a revolutionary change into blocks of flats with common kitchens, common dining-rooms, and common nurseries; all that will come, has come, is extending, but it is not yet general. The first step is the break-up of the Victorian house into maisonettes. You can see this going on all over central London, where two families now share a house built for one. Others are being absorbed by the boarding-house. Briefly, we are packing closer into the old spaciousness, partly because we do not need

it for the purposes of ostentation, partly because we cannot afford it.

Still, there is much left of old, bleak London, Highbury Crescent, Warwick Street (Pimlico), Mornington Crescent, and many others. There is, about those places, what there is more proximately about Bayswater, a sense of past comfort, dating back to the days when comfort meant red paper in the hall, brown paint, thick stuff curtains, polished boards, large and straight chairs with hard seats for the young, stuffed seats for the old. Those houses were comfortable in a frowzy way; they were houses in which one ate a great deal, slept a great deal, drank a great deal, and thought within the limits of genteel taste. Little by little people began to stay up later, so had less time to sleep; then, their fathers having drunk too much, they found that their inherited constitutions did not allow of similar excess, while the intrusive foreigner brought in his curious dishes which taught us to eat less, if more peculiarly. Picture galleries were opened on Sunday, concerts were held upon that day; matinees, cinemas, other pleasures, all these things making a continual call upon time and purse, have stolen some of its privileges from the old home, until it ceased to be home in the sacramental sense, a pleasure in itself, and turned into a dormitory. The bleak old houses of London have responded to this movement, by breaking up into maisonettes, converting themselves into boarding-houses and lodgings; there are now few claimants to their five floors; indeed, the five floors grow more and more disliked. To-day, when you walk along a street such as Mornington Crescent, whose gray face wears the inscription: 'Joy forbidden,' you are to a certain extent, labouring under an illusion, for the life behind those gray fronts is not gray. It is, more and more, the life of people who have no roots, who have settled for a short time in rooms, whose employment is precarious, whose fortunes are small, people who live on small weekly wages, or even on social piracy, whose presence must cause uneasiness among the portly Victorian ghosts. Inside those houses live few families, because no families of wealth care to live in such districts, while poor

AN ABSENT DESERT
THE CROMWELL ROAD

families cannot afford the servants to keep such houses clean. So their dwellers are, many of them, adventurers, semi-respectable people who have something to do with the stage, or who are in a sort of way in the city. They never want the windows cleaned, and when they sit down at the Victorian writing-desk with the waggly legs, they care little if it is not dusted: they blow. That is the end of those old houses; to-day, most of them are spinning out the last of their long leases in a truly Victorian way: keeping up appearances, and pretending to be as respectable as ever.

In South Kensington and Bayswater, the bleakness is less complete, because those districts are dimly in the West End, with a little too much End about it. They are ' possible ' districts, as the phrase goes among some of us; a ' possible ' district is one the name of which can be stamped upon one's note-paper. The tenants of Bayswater and South Kensington number many of the old-fashioned people who like quiet places, comfortable homes, in some cases gardens, but many more are making of those places a jumping-off ground. They pass through Bayswater or South Kensington on the way to Mayfair, Belgravia, and Marylebone; they are already well-to-do, and intend to be better-to-do; in those places they associate with the people who, once upon a time, were very well-to-do and are now less so; those districts are social junctions. But everywhere the boarding-house is gaining ground, and nowhere does one see this so well as in Cromwell Road. Cromwell Road is a remarkable street; its length has, on a warm and hazy day, a quality of eternity. It seems to have no beginning, no end; one might walk for ever along its broad stretch, between those high walls; a prison yard must be like that. This does not mean that I dislike Cromwell Road; far from it; I visit it at least once a week, for purposes of meditation. One can meditate in Cromwell Road, because nothing ever seems to have happened there; it certainly looks as if nothing could happen. It holds no tragedy, no comedy. You pass along the endless series of houses, all of which have four and a half or five and a half floors, the half being accounted for by the servants' rooms, to which the Victorian builder never accorded a complete floor; they are nearly

all alike, having five to nine steps, a porch on pillars, and a flat face; the only difference between one house and another is the age of their lease, the age being revealed by the condition of the paint: some were repainted three years ago, some two years, some recently. White, gray, black, such is their symphony. If you look in at the windows of the dining-room you will generally see a large mahogany table: in the middle of this stands a heavy brass pot; in the brass pot grows a big green fern. Behind the green fern, and always facing the window, stands a colossal side-board, surmounted by a mirror against which is outlined a tantalus and sometimes, which is very regrettable, a cruet. (You do not see a bottle of salad-dressing in Cromwell Road, but a little farther west you do.) Near the tantalus sometimes dwell a silver cup or two. On one side of the room you discern a mantelpiece, decorated with coloured pots, a large, black marble clock, suitably representing a tomb. There may also be some brass ash-trays and bowls of obviously Indian pattern. The carpet one cannot see, but I feel sure that it is generally a red and blue Turkey. That is old Cromwell Road, grandpapa's old Cromwell Road, comfortable in its stifled sort of way. Rail as I may at the Victorian period, I have a vague liking for those old solidities, that mean pleasant, saddleback chairs, pipes (not cigarettes), the *Spectator*, port, and evenings devoted to the reading of travel books and memoirs (not novels). Dull, but solid, and in Cromwell Road one is aware of a certain merit in solidity because it finds itself at the point of flux between the old civilisation and the new.

The new civilisation has already set its teeth into Cromwell Road. The houses are unchanged, but a great many have been bought up and joined together, decorated with stained glass, re-named as hotels. These have fancy pots instead of brass pots, ferns from strange bournes; curtains of lesser conventionality; looking out from a window you no longer see Mary Jane in a pink dress, but a sombre face, which may be that of a musician or a poet; or of a Balkanic waiter stained with political conspiracy. The inhabitants of those hotels are Americans, provincials, people

who have grown tired of housekeeping and like to buy it ready-made; they number many widows who behave as if they were conscious of a transitory condition, actors, unattached people of all kinds. These are not the old Cromwell Road people; they are a new type, which you might call the Cromwell light-Roadster, people who drive up in taxis at all times, and even after eleven o'clock. Kensington means nothing to them; not one of them will ever be an alderman. They are breaking up the Cromwell Road, and many of those who read these lines will see Cromwell Road without a private dwelling-house, except that here and there a pair of very old maids, accompanied by some very fat dogs, will stick to the old house. They will groan at the taxis which stop at the Grand Imperial next door, send out an old retainer to warn off the street band, and grumble at the electric underground, just as they grumbled at the smoky steam underground. Then they will die, and the Grand Imperial will extend its possessions.

The Grand Imperial is extending all over London. Not only have hotels, undreamt of twenty years ago, sprung up at unexpected corners near the Strand and over the tube stations, not only have they taken over anything between two and six private houses at a time, but they are buying up site after site: a big one in Piccadilly near Down Street, also the St George's Hospital site, perhaps. They are extending everywhere, communising life. It is all very well saying that the hotel is a sign of the decadent luxury of the day, but that is not true. In the first place there is in hotels no such thing as decadent luxury; all that the best offer are things such as plenty of light, air, space to move in, electric light when you want it, hot water day and night, a telephone by your bedside, a comfortable common room to write in, a band to amuse you while you have your meals; such like simple, obvious things which make up the ordinary comfort of life. The old-fashioned people look upon this as luxury, but I submit that the facility of having a hot bath when you want it is a natural thing, and one of the first things that a developing civilisation should give us all. Some people seem to think it

morally wrong to be comfortable, and it shocks one to think that so many of our best minds should, for so long, have been working out ideas for pleasant and harmonious heating, lighting, cooking, only to be told that they are pampering us. The whole object of civilisation is to pamper us, to get rid of nature. Nature is all very well in the summer numbers of the magazines; it looks very pink and scented with hay, but real nature is rather cold, damp, earwiggy, dark, always ill-drained, and much less healthy than London. The object of civilisation is to reduce the struggle for life, and to make the material side of it pleasant enough to be forgotten. If that is not true, then let us back to the cave-man forthwith.

The truth is that hotels are not luxurious and not dear. It sounds dear to pay a pound a day for a bedroom and your board, which is what one paid before the war, but if one reflects that for that pound one also has the use of excellent common rooms, that one pays nothing whatever for all sorts of racking things such as gas, electric light, water rate, borough rate, inhabited house duty, house repairs, that one owes nothing to the sweep, no tips to tradesmen, it is not dear. One has the space one needs to live in, and that is the essence of the old-fashioned opposition to hotel life: it does away with the large number of rooms that people used to think they needed, rooms in which they shut themselves up behind closed windows and drawn blinds. The old-fashioned hate the simplification of life; they do not like to think that people need no longer tie themselves down, define and label themselves: hotels are meant for those who do not go to the Zoo.

Indeed, the Zoo is a tragic hint of the period we have just left behind. It was founded in 1826, its object being, of course, ' to further the study of animal life,' but it did not very long retain that character. The only character it retained was a sort of brutal insensibility, a capacity for not understanding what it means to animals, accustomed to run forty miles a day, or to fly out of sight, to find themselves boxed up in small cages. The treatment of animals in the Victorian period was very like the treatment of

BEASTS AT THE ZOO

children; people meant well by their children, which did not prevent their constraining them to immobility on Sundays, forcing them into careers they disliked, or into marriages with people they detested. They were a sentimental and brutal generation, mainly because they were stupid. So the Zoo, which is now a vulgar gapery, remains as one of the ugly blots inherited by our people; I hope to live long enough to see Parliament pass an act for its suppression. It seems to me indecent that people who do not know the difference between a leopard and a yak should, any afternoon, for sixpence or a shilling, or on Sundays if they are the friends or the servants of a Fellow, line up in hundreds outside cages anything between six feet and thirty feet long, to see wretched animals pace up and down, up and down eternally, or tragic birds hop from an upper stick to a lower stick and then back again, not one of them with the space for a full spring or a flight, sentenced to penal servitude for life, a sentence which we inflict on no man except for murder. I agree with Mr Galsworthy that the Zoo is one of the saddest and most disgusting sights in the world. At least, I know that I never leave the Zoo, which I seldom visit, because it hurts me, without feeling a partner in a national crime. You can defend vivisection by saying that it has valuable medical results. I know nothing about that, but you cannot defend the Zoo by saying that you give some snivelling boy an opportunity to know what the mandril looks like. What is the use (I put it on the lowest ground, that of use) of knowing what a mandril looks like? And if it is of any use, is that use not counterbalanced by the poison poured into that boy, which is that he shall consent to the life-long imprisonment of a helpless creature?

This Zoo question was discussed in the *Weekly Dispatch* some years ago; I think that one of the points, in defence, was that most of the animals were born in the Zoo, and, knowing not liberty, could not be unhappy. That may be, even if nothing in you answers when you look into the eyes of the animals in those empty cages where there is nothing to do, when all their nature, thousands of generations of it, is calling in their blood to hunt and to fly. Is not the test this: would you be satisfied if at birth your son

were placed in a room eight feet by four, and told to grow up in it? Do you really believe that he would be content when he reached manhood? even if he had never known freedom. The truth is represented by opinions such as that of the secretary of the Zoo, Doctor Chalmers Mitchell, who summed up Mr Galsworthy's attack on the Zoo by saying: 'Mr Galsworthy knows nothing about the subject. His attack is rubbish, pure rubbish.' It may be that, on second thoughts, Doctor Chalmers Mitchell might find one or two more arguments to put up against Mr Galsworthy, but this one, while not lacking in force, somehow fails to convince. One is more impressed by the argument of Mr J. D. Hamlyn, an animal trainer, who said: 'After the war, the business of importing animals will go on exactly as it did before. In the first place, too much capital is at stake, too much money has been expended to give up the trade altogether.' The only comment I have to make on this is that this argument was continually used, first in the West Indies, and later in the southern states of America, when it was suggested that we should do away with slavery.

Yes, the Zoo carries on to-day the old tradition of Victorian brutality. But enough of the Zoo, and of its visitors, so like the yokels at a fair, that guffaw with their heads through horse collars. I would rather think that in a few of those Victorian places, sweet old ladies in mauve silk and lace serve tea in Rockingham cups, which they dust themselves for fear of Sarah Jane. One such place is Crescent Grove. That is the sort of place one would like to live in, when one feels rather older. It is near Clapham Common, and, of course, it is a blind alley, so that no rude traffic may pass up and down when the milkman has finished his melodious round. The houses are clean, stuccoed, comfortable. The knockers are cleaned every day. The glass is cleaned often, the curtains are changed, and I am sure that when they go up, a whiff of lavender spreads. Crescent Grove is, perhaps, a little too clean; in those rooms where everything has its place, just as in the past every one had his place, there must be so much order and regularity of life that, as Mirbeau said: 'On doit rudement s'embêter

là-dedans.' Still, at the very end of Crescent Grove, there is one house that should be preserved as a monument of its period. Of course, it is double-fronted; in front are planted evergreens, and there is a drive. By the side runs a large garden beyond a wall; on the other side of the wall one hears children at play. That is the house to which father came back round about 1860, with his top hat and his mutton-chop whiskers. If this description does not convince you, let me give you the clinching fact: it is a private road. Yet Crescent Grove stands very near to the suburbs. Not far are Streatham, Tooting, the new streets of Clapham and Brixton. Imbedded among the new streets are old houses with columns, plaster fronts, stucco mouldings, squares surrounding a single column that bears a moulting golden eagle, but the suburbs are overwhelming them. These are not the inner suburbs, such as Brixton, where the feeling is, on the whole, one of poverty and dirt. Those inner suburbs have a certain vigour of coarse life; thus, the Brixton Road is a place of immense activity, notably round the great, open-air ironmonger, Williamson's Bonanza; there are shops and shops, nearly all of the multiple type, Salmon and Gluckstein, Maypole Dairies, Home and Colonials, the shops that Private Ortheris must have raved of in his Indian delirium. Likewise, in Kilburn, where the Kilburn Bon Marché and B. B. Evans struggle in zealous commercialism. Those inner suburbs are hardly suburbs now, for the trams run through them and bleed them of their population; tubes tap them; everywhere the motor-buses stop. The true suburbs lie farther out. You have to go well beyond the Brixton Bon Marché before you can find such a place as Streatham, with its endless, well-kept, villa streets of red brick houses, nearly all alike, creeper and grass plot complete. Those suburbs outline a new social order; with a little experience you can easily tell the thirty-five-pounds-a-year street from the fifty-two-pounds-a-year street; you come with a feeling of familiarity upon the corner house, where lives the doctor or the surgeon. It is a new order, for all those houses are small, manageable, clean, modern, in every way satisfactory, except that they are all alike, made for people who may not be all alike, but

tend so to become. For if one buys one's food, one's clothes, one's furniture at the same big, local store, and if one takes one's literature from the same bookstall, one attains to a sort of nationality. But it is not the nationality of the village, where local effort can develop into art, because it develops slowly and creeps back upon itself. In the suburbs everything is supplied on the model of central London, and is turned out in hundreds of thousands by machines. Perhaps the houses are made by machines. Maybe, one day the people will be made by machines. Near those streets, all alike, generally survives an older quarter of poor streets where live the 'little women,' the sweep, the turncock, the dependents of the semi-poor; there, also, small shopkeepers live by undercutting the big stores. They do this by selling the vegetables that are too stale for the stores, by washing the linen which cannot be sent to the steam laundry because it would fall to pieces, and especially by lowering their own standard of living to the lowest possible level. They are the last ramparts of suburban individualism, and they will not last long. As time goes on, the bigger villa streets, many of whose houses have pretensions, exemplified by their architecture of concrete and tile, by their barbarous roofs which make evil, dusty corners in the rooms, by the select flowers in their front gardens, will turn away from those little shops and, more and more, deal with Whiteley's and Harrod's.

Thus, when one passes through London, from old Victorian street to inner suburb, then to outer suburb, until one comes to the spreading country of Tooting Bec Common, when one has seen the homes of the rich, their marble solemnity, when one has seen those of the poor in the grimy suburbs that cluster, and emerges at last into those clean suburban streets, where in almost every window an aspidistra wilts in its pot, one may grow a little doubtful of the social revolution. We educate the poor, and sometimes we give them their chance: the next step is the aspidistra. The aspidistra goes to the grammar school; clever aspidistra wins a scholarship and goes to Oxford. Then a house is taken, let us say, in Barkston Gardens; instead of the

aspidistra it is marguerites in the window boxes. The marguerite goes to Oxford as a matter of course, and may give place to a lily in a green art-pot. By that time it understands nothing. If it retains its money, the marguerite goes on having marguerites potted in the window-boxes by the nurseryman; if it loses its money, it goes back to the aspidistra. Upon this gloomy botanical note I close this chapter.

IX
CAFÉ ROYAL

CHAPTER IX

CAFÉ ROYAL

WHY did they call it Café Royal? It has nothing of the opulent white and gold quality which naturally would go with such a name, nothing expensive or elaborate. Here and there, in the only room I know, namely, the café itself, is an escutcheon impressed with the letter N. It makes one think of Napoleon, and the name Café Royal clashes still more. But, after all, that matters very little, for who cares what the Café Royal was? or under whose auspices it was founded. I suppose that for antiquity it treads upon the heels of Verrey's; it has a flavour of 1870 rather than 1860; what matters much more is that the Café Royal always savours of the day, that it concentrates within itself more of the feeling of the day, as exemplified by current art, than any other spot in this country. Thus, when calling this chapter Café Royal, I do not mean to devote it to an anecdotic study of the famous tavern, but rather to those things which it represents and contains, to some slight impression of the arts as they develop, flourish, and wilt in this city. The Café itself should never have been called Royal, for an eternal opposition exists between the pomp of such a name and the rebellious young arts; in no essential do they oppose the royal suggestion, but they are remote therefrom, live in a world where the values are different, not related to class or fortune, artificial, perhaps, but created in virtue of a private political economy. Thus, the Café Royal should have been called something dashing and picturesque, such as 'Café des Mille Colonnes,' or 'Café de la Pomme Vermeille.' How well it would have looked, sparsely decorated with rubicund apples painted by Cézanne! As it is, the Café Royal is a very large room in Regent Street. Its ceiling, a mass of gold scrollings that embrace frescoes darkened by smoke and time into the colour of old masters, is sustained by many columns with a golden base and a green stem. Round that stem intertwine golden leaves from which hang golden grapes. The effect of the Café is one of rather excessive

gilding: the walls are crowded with gilt figures and baskets of flowers that leave space only for many mirrors; as if the wall had been hidden away at the behest of some obscure modesty. Yet the effect is pleasant, for this gold is old and tarnished. It has nothing blatant, and the whole effect is one of comfortable decency, as if this excessive room had been built by a parvenu, but had been lived in so long by his successors as to lose the parvenu spirit. The furnishing, plain tables with marble tops, long seats with red plush backs, also resolve themselves into good-humoured comfort, while, at the end, a prince of bars with something like ten score bottles, each one filled with something individual, produces an impression of eclectic welcome.

The Café Royal may have been built to astound, but nowadays it is just the comfortable background of people who like to drink a little, to pay moderately, and to talk enormously. The conversations at the Café Royal are not, probably, such as would make a good book of memoirs, but its mixed public has, at one time or another, numbered everybody who did something (whatever that may mean), so that many good things and many spiteful ones are spoken every day under its golden roof. Before the war, the violent young men and the much more violent young women seemed to meet there every night, with an almost sacramental air, to discuss, that is to scarify, reputations. That was good, for Renan was right when he said that if a young man, aged twenty, had not always ready a mouthful of insults for his predecessors, he would pronounce no judgments fit to be heard when he attained the age of forty.

This does not mean that the Café Royal is a literary café, or an artistic café. The literary, dramatic, and pictorial elements are certainly stronger there than in any other London resort, but at any time you may see there the strangest assembly: foreigners, a great many; smart people who are seeing life; and very dull, ordinary, fat men who stop on their way from business or shop to have a drink before dinner. At dinner time the room is not itself, for half of it sees its marble tables covered with cloths, which means that eating proceeds, and eating does not, so well as

THE CAFÉ ROYAL

I. full page 122

drinking, favour turbulent debate. It is just before dinner, and especially after dinner, that the Café Royal enters upon its true function: to provide a pleasant, cheap place, fairly noisy, fairly smoky, and fairly comfortable, where the young arts may meet and joust. During the war it did not quite do this, for many of the young men had joined the army, and it was strange suddenly to recognise over a tunic, in a well-kept, well-brushed head, the outlines of somebody whom once one knew with endless locks, whiskers, or a beard. Even in khaki they did what they could. Military discipline did not completely dominate those rebellious beings; their moustaches were either a little more luxuriant or very much more hogged than usual. The Café Royal platoon was still faintly noticeable.

Some, however, were not in khaki, for theirs was not a very fit generation, and even now many a table throws back a memory to 1914. In those days the frequent visitor to the Café Royal soon knew many people by sight, and if he was of that world, or had somebody to guide him, he soon could pick out those who were celebrated and those who were notorious; with time, he even came to recognise those who were extremely well known. I do not know if, nowadays, one often sees at the Café Royal, Mr Jacob Epstein, but once it was difficult to detach one's eyes from the sleepy strength of his heavy profile. One wanted to look into those eyes with the thick lids, in which strangely mingled so much detachment and so much kinetic energy. He was seldom alone; there was always a little Epstein group about his table. Indeed, it is a characteristic of the Café Royal that few people sit alone. They form groups. One I remember well. It always contained a tall young man with very long, thin features, and hair grown low about the cheek; he had a fancy for clothes faintly 1860 in feeling, notably, for stocks. There was an extremely beautiful girl, thin, dark, and languid as some warm Italian greyhound. There was a young man who wore a velvet coat, whose fair hair fell in long wisps upon his collar, a strange young man, with a peculiar grayish skin and an air of nervous excitement. Round these moved other figures less definite, but all of them

young: square men in knickerbockers, with short pipes stuck precisely in the middle of their faces; girls, outrageously florid or eloquently simple, round whose long necks hung the flowered yokes of Chelsea, on whose hands clustered many rings of turquoise and aquamarine, or whose hands were virgin of all decoration save that of black finger-nails. The smart people used to watch them steadily and feel that, at last, they were really seeing life.

Sometimes they saw people whose names could serve as conversation at the morrow's lunch party. Sometimes they caught sight of Mr C. R. W. Nevinson, and could describe his square figure, his rather blunt, pleasant face with the bright, live, brown eyes. It does one good to look at Mr Nevinson, though, nowadays, something oppressed has crept into his expression; there is, in those rather thick features, a sense of life and desire. With him sometimes goes his wife, slight, white and rose, and bending a little under the heavy sunshine of her hair.

Until recently the Café Royal also often contained Mr Augustus John, and one could sit for a long time, wondering what it was gave his features that air of tautness. There is always about Mr John a feeling that he is imprisoned within himself. . . . Equally with Mr Epstein he had his court, young men in a state of extreme reverence, and other men who preached to him in attitudes of hostility tinged with nervousness, which is the ordinary approach to the successful painter of those who are less successful. I think that, now and then, Mr Arthur Symons used to draw them away, so as to procure for Mr John a greater peace. It was as if he were trying to create about him an atmosphere of hush. At the Café Royal this is not easily done. Notably, it was difficult to create hush among the reverential young men, for I suspect that they all wanted to know what Mr John thought of their work, that is meant to tell him what he ought to think. The young women were more easily managed, and it is interesting to note that they tended to approximate in appearance to the John type. Nearly all were what the vulgar call plain, in some cases because they were perfectly beautiful: that which is perfectly beautiful is severe and separate; it does not arouse desire, it

arouses respect, and this most of humanity cannot forgive. Those strange young women, apparently long-legged and long-armed, in their simply-cut high frocks that hung straight from shoulder to ankle, young women with hair plainly banded, rather long noses, strong chins, thick, dark mouths, like open fruits. They seemed to come straight out of some sketch in Donegal.

There were many others, too. Now and then one caught sight of Mr Wyndham Lewis who, nowadays, is plump, but in those was tall and white and rather slim, often silent and generally weary; it was an education in negligence to watch the depressed droop of the cigarette stump which generally hung from his underlip. There were others, too, a woman with small, humorous eyes and a pleasant coppery complexion, who wore turbans of purple silk and gold, who never thought or spoke an evil thing of any creature alive. One saw Mr Gertler, very young and seductive, perhaps a little conscious of it; Mr Gilbert Cannan, oozing defiance from every sharp angle and confining his conversation to this process. The other young writers came now and then: Mr Swinnerton before he grew his beard, Mr Hugh Walpole, who always seemed slightly out of place in so ill-regulated a spot. People less definable float through my mind: a young girl who had been told that she looked like a Russian, and thenceforth appeared attired in a red sarafan; a young man with black locks massed upon his eyebrows, locks he often tossed back to show the running water of his pale eyes. There was a young woman who believed in asceticism; as she looked rather like a brick, I was told that her beliefs had never been put to a rude test. There was another young woman, too, who seriously informed any marble table that she believed in reincarnation, and that within her breathed the soul of Shelley. Nearly everybody painted, some wrote verse, a few ventured on prose; the talk was of art and of sinners against art. Swiftly they passed from studio scandal to the declarations, manifestoes, proclamations which made the arts sound foolish in 1914, but actually were evidences of their vigour. Indeed, the modern forms of art tend to shock the Philistine: I am not with him; I like my paint wet.

The old arts are unkind to the young arts. Struck by a certain wilful outrageousness which often overlays talent and in the beginning always heralds it, the old arts make as much fun of the new arts, as the old arts made of the older when they were young. Some of my readers may remember Mr Epstein's rather theoretical Venus, at whose feet reposed a wheel. It was an abstract piece of sculpture, but, however abstract, I think it was a little harsh of Mrs Aria to describe it as a sick penguin sitting on a broken bicycle. The truth is that the modern forms of art are not as wilful or as intentionally shocking as their adepts choose to make out. It may be true that most schools, from the impressionists onwards, have formed round one man who had something original to say in an original way, and that most of the pupils, having nothing original to say, found it necessary to say it in a violently original way. That is true to a certain extent; truer, perhaps, is it to say that 'genius creates the taste with which it is enjoyed.' Thus, I think it quite as likely that people like Manet created the taste for impressionism, just as Wagner created a taste for music in reaction against, let us say, Rossini. Nature, after all, is only a thing which one conceives, and not a thing which really exists; it varies with the eye that beholds it, and if a man sincerely and violently feels that trees are pink, then to him they are pink, and if he has art enough to translate his temperament into those pink trees, then the people who can understand him will learn to see trees like him, that is, pink. We need not stress this, because it is an extreme case, but I submit that the modern forms of art, during the last dozen years, have all of them tended to express nature on the lines of certain conventions, and that instead of taking up an attitude of contempt, it was easy to understand these conventions, therefore, to understand the artist, therefore, to collect from the canvas the impression he painted there. Here, I will be told by the Philistine: 'Why should I see that a face looks like a cube?' Well, nobody wants to force him to see a face as a cube if he doesn't want to, but one is entitled to point out to him that he has already accepted many conventions. He is quite willing to look at Gainsborough's 'Blue Boy,' and to see it

PRIVATE VIEW
THE A.A.A.

To face page 120

as a human figure, though it has only surface and not volume. He is quite willing to look at Venus of Milo and to accept it as a reproduction of a beautiful woman, though it has no colour. He is quite willing to go to a play the action of which extends over five years, and to see this action condensed into two and a half hours. The public has to accept the arts conventionally, because the arts do not reproduce nature, they interpret it.

It may, therefore, be suggested that our young post-impressionists, futurists, and cubists were badly treated by the public, for the public never tried to understand the new conventions on which they worked. With all the power of my sincerity, and in the name of such honesty as may be in me, I assure my readers that if they will take the trouble to master the conventions the work can be interpreted. I possess an excellent non-representational picture, by Mr Wadsworth, inspired by the roofs of a Yorkshire village; it is entirely composed of black and white planes. When, lately, this was shown to a friend, she asked why she should be told to admire a set of decayed dominoes. But the picture is not made up of decayed dominoes; it is a highly simplified impression of walls and roofs, and when you have sympathetically sought for what we may call the key plane, the picture becomes absolutely obvious.

But what if it were not obvious? Many of the modern men, such as Mr Wadsworth, Mr McKnight Kauffer, Mr Wyndham Lewis, do not aspire to represent anything at all. What they want to do is to sketch or paint an interesting pattern. Mr Ezra Pound has put the attitude clearly in his book, *Gaudier Brzeska*, where he says, more or less: 'When you hear a sonata played, you do not say, " Oh, what an eloquent reproduction of the waves upon the shore! " or, " This is where the sheep begin to baa." What you do is to ask yourself whether this combination of sounds is pleasant or moving. That is the freedom we wish to find in painting or sculpture. We are not interested in painting the Mayor of Leeds in such a way as to make it clear that he is a mayor, possibly of Leeds, but we are interested in setting together

lines and coloured surfaces, irrespective of any meaning, and to be judged on that, according to whether these lines and colours produce a pleasant sensation.'

This position appears to me above attack. The technical improvements in painting, which began in the seventeenth century, producing Rembrandt, Raphael, Velasquez, and, in due course, Sir Edward Poynter, seem to have set a heavy yoke upon the painter's neck, for the painter grew enthralled by technique, became more and more inclined to represent a baby so life-like that everybody expected it to howl; he grew liable to lose sight of the one thing that matters, namely, that to represent a baby is nothing, and to represent the artist through the baby, everything. (If I am wrong, consider a picture by Mr Clausen and a photograph by Mr Park; Mr Clausen knows how to paint, but Mr Park will far more exactly reproduce the sitter, do it quicker, and much more cheaply.) The thesis of the modern artist, of which I am trying to give an impression, therefore involves that while we bow to the undeniable greatness of men such as Rembrandt, Botticelli, Leonardo, we wonder whether a greater emancipation from their technique might not have allowed them to soar higher into the abstract region where none save an artist can breathe. The plea is that in a more abstract field they might have been still greater.

Undeniably, the modern forms of art have emancipated themselves too much from technical restrictions. It is dangerous to have too much technique; it is dangerous to have too little, and I could not say who suavely broods in the golden mean. Still, when we consider what a dead and damnable thing technique alone can be, when we consider the annual mortuary at Burlington House, when we stand awhile before a work of Mr Frank Dicksee, and stare incredulously at Sir Luke Fildes's 'The Doctor,' or attempt to solve the Hon. John Collier's psycho-pictorial mysteries, we are indeed assured that though technique may exclude a man both from heaven and from hell, it shall, for certain, land him in purgatory.

I remember very well the first 'advanced' pictures I ever

saw. They were twelve impressions of a bridge over a brook by Claude Monet. That must have been nearly twenty years ago, and I thought them very beautiful. It is strange that nowadays they seem so tame. But it does not matter to me that I thought them beautiful then, just as when I first saw a Matisse I thought it interesting, that my first Gauguin, with its queer brown figures stirred me; it matters to me that when the futurists came to town, Mr Marinetti did not strike me as a marionette, and that later all the others, cubists, boulists, imagists, vorticists, were taken by me as honest men. You may call me a fool; you may even think worse of me and say that I was so anxious to be in the movement that I liked every movement; I prefer to say that I was always ready to try to understand a new pictorial convention. When I cease to be able to do that, when I cease to see in painting that Mr Wadsworth is deeply interesting, in literature, that Mr James Joyce is strikingly individual, when I am Philistine enough to hang a painter because I won't hang his picture, then, indeed, shall I be middle-aged and take to meals.

The years between 1908 or so and 1914 were some of the most important English art has passed through. In those six or seven years, for the first time, London saw the post-impressionists, not only Matisse, but also Cézanne and Picasso; she saw the futurists, the singular pictures of views from a moving train which, faulty as they were, were well worth painting, because from a moving train one does see things, therefore material for art. She saw Severini's 'Pan-Pan Dance,' where colour and surface dance rather than men and women; she saw the coming of Mr Epstein, first in the statues outside the British Medical Association, which were said to be indecent and became famous; she also saw reproductions of Mr Epstein's Oscar Wilde monument, which went to Paris and was said to be indecent and became kilted. The cubists came in the train of Mr Metzinger. The non-representational movement extended, radiating round Mr Wyndham Lewis, impressing many men and women, among whom, in those days, was found true ability. It was a breathless and beautiful period, where everybody was under

thirty and many were under twenty, when people painted not for art's sake, but consciously for the expression of self. When that self was feeble, the painting was feeble. But it was not always so. Many ridiculous things were done; many ridiculous things were said in the Café Royal and out of it, but, as Miss May Sinclair puts it very well, these young men had not come to destroy the pictorial glories of the past; they had come to destroy their imitators. Conscious of their period, they wanted to express it.

Some have suggested that the modern forms of painting were merely outbreaks of youth, that these movements had severed the continuity which should exist between one period and another. Now the modern young man is generally arrogant, and if you talked to him of continuity would say, perhaps: 'I don't want any ancestors; I am an ancestor.' But he would be wrong. From Monet to Matisse, from Matisse to the early Nevinson, from the early Nevinson to the modern Wyndham Lewis, the link is close. No doubt a pen better versed than mine could link Monet with Giotto. I cannot; for I find it difficult to think back further than fifty years.

There have been reactions. One of the most notable is that of Mr Nevinson, who is to-day the most popular of the young men, the one who has been most completely recognised by a broad public. Certainly he has become more recognisable, though I am not of those who think that his work has thereby lost. A man may be great and esoteric, or he may be great and lucid. It all depends on the way in which the dice fall. The several exhibitions of Mr Nevinson's work, during the war, have shown him more and more gaining independence. He began by adopting one of the cubist conventions; he is still able to do so when he wishes, but he is also able to use other conventions, even the most stereotyped, when his subject seems to demand it. He paints pattern, or subject, or idea, but an interesting sidelight on his attitude is hatred of all cliques. In the preface of his last exhibition, he bitterly assails the people who seek 'pure form through nothing but still life, endless green apples, saucepans,

and oranges, picasized and cezanned with a ponderous and self-conscious sub-consciousness.' He hates what he calls the child-like antics and the gambolling of the elect of Bloomsbury. He may not be quite fair, but when I remember the various cliques to which I had occasional access, the Rhythm clique, for whom nobody existed except Anne Estelle Rice, J. D. Fergusson, Jessie Dismorr, and George Banks . . . until the review changed its name, when most of these people ceased to exist and nobody but Mr Albert Rutherston was granted physical likelihood, when I reflect how Mr Nevinson used to cluster with many others in a cosy cube, only to be driven out at last at the point of a cone, when I reflect upon the sombre mystery that surrounds the adepts of Mr Roger Fry (a mystery recently grown less sombre with success), I am assured that cliques are the necessary breeding-ground of talent because they fortify its members against the cackling Philistine. But they are also the thing which keeps talent small and parochial once they have helped it to grow. The clique is the nursery, and the test of a man is whether he knows when he is grown up. The art clique is like journalism, which can lead you anywhere provided you forsake it.

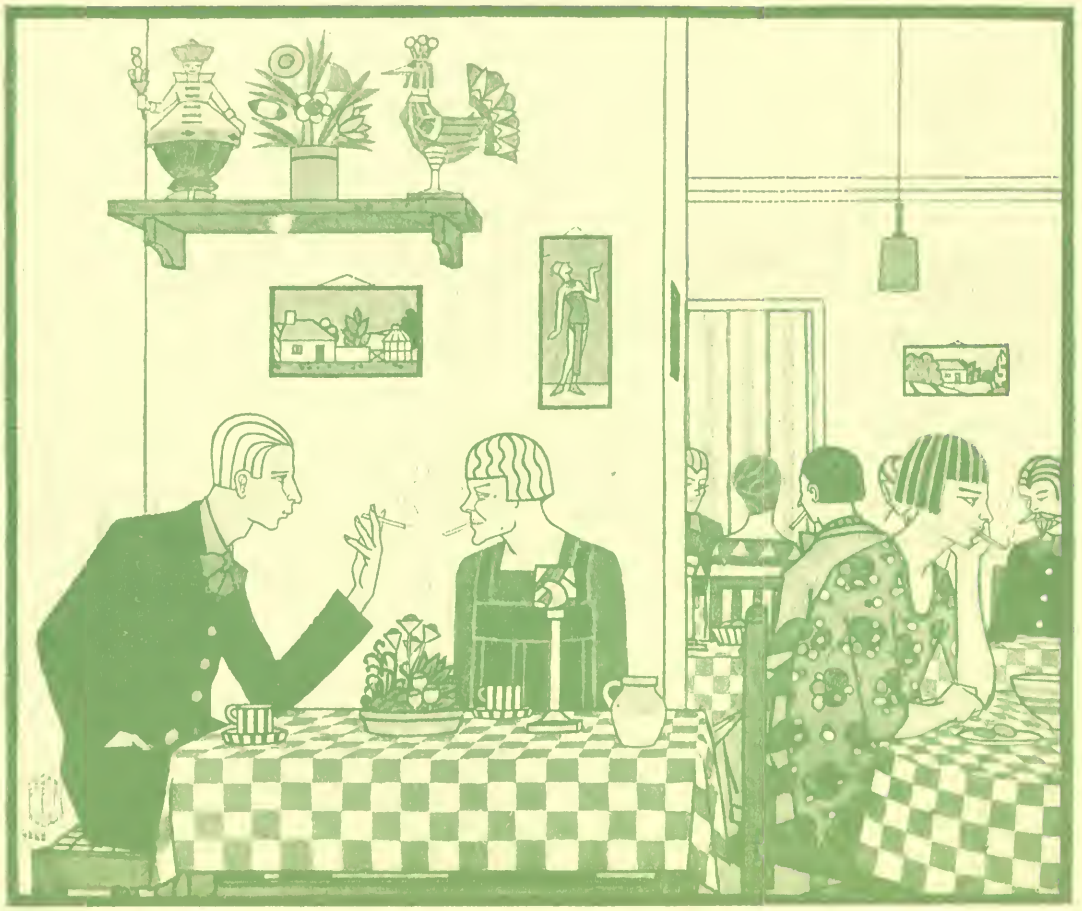
Most of the cliques have their being in Chelsea, though Fitzroy Square and the Garden City occasionally put forward claims, and Bedford Park asserts itself. I suspect that the movement is nowadays away from Chelsea. King's Road grows every day more mercantile; nothing in it recalls the arts except a slight excess of shops which sell artists' materials. One does meet the Chelsea girl, no longer in a jibbah, but more likely in an eloquent sweater, with her hair cut short and her feet brogued, but then the Chelsea style has crept into many circles. You can go into the Chenil Gallery, where you will always find works by Mr Augustus John and Mr Gill; you can even go and have lunch at the Good Intent, but somehow Chelsea will not seem to you very Chelsea-ish. Indeed, there are rows and rows of studios near Glebe Place, Church Street, Redcliffe Square, in all sorts of odd back-yards and shanties, but the whole thing does not hold

together. At the Good Intent, for instance, you will find a small, quiet restaurant, decorated with old furniture, pictures that may have been advanced once upon a time, a jolly old pug, very fat and wheezing, its portraits on the wall, grossly flattered, with a mauve ribbon round its neck; you will see at the tables mainly women who live at local diggings, rather tired and lonely looking, as women grow when they live in diggings and toast muffins on the gas stove.

No, Chelsea is nowadays too successful to be a locality for artists. Cheyne Walk has become too famous and too rich, for artists cannot live together, unless it is in a sort of Alsatia where you must pay your footing in such coin as the keeper thinks fit. Nowadays, the arts tend to scatter. They can be found in Chalk Farm, even in Paddington, some say in Bayswater, though this is not likely. They tend to live more privately than they do in Paris, where half the day seems to be spent at the Lilas. (Oh, how I hate the Lilas! The last time I went there, there was an enormous crowd; a hairy Russian philosopher stood on my right foot while he read bad French translations from the Sanskrit; meanwhile, two young people stood on my left foot and made love.) In London the arts meet at their communal places, in certain restaurants which they discover and then forsake, at the Coq d'Or, at little dancing clubs. If only the Philistine hated them more, they might cling closer.

Still, the arts are not, in London, as absent and ignored as the foreigner likes to think. It is true, as Mr Nevinson says, that owing chiefly to our Press, to our loathsome, tradition-loving public schools and our antiquity-stinking universities, the average Englishman is not merely suspicious of the new in all intellectual and artistic experiment, but he is mentally trained to be so unsportsmanlike as to try to kill every new endeavour in embryo. It is true, but it does not matter. The arts are vigorous, and in the end, those who came to kill stay to buy. That will be seen as time goes on.

Is it, I wonder, a symptom of the English attitude to the arts, that the chapter which concerns them should, in the words of



THE GOOD INTENT
CHELSEA

To face page 132

Mr Henry James, drag far in the dusty rear of this book? Perhaps, though London of to-day is so vivid and so eloquent, so full of sharp colour and true line that, when I consider her music, I am inclined to think that she would not have attained her crisp and harmonious form if some creative instinct within her humorous, pessimistic, and languid people had not presided over her birth, and favoured her composite life.